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CATHERINE SFORZA



CATHERINE SFORZA.

AT THE AGE OF 18—1481.

From a Painting attributed to Marco Palmeggiani

(Forlì Gallery)

# CATHERINE SFORZA

BY

COUNT PIER DESIDERIO PASOLINI

AUTHORIZED EDITION, TRANSLATED AND PREPARED
WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF THE AUTHOR

BY

PAUL SYLVESTER

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WILLIAM HEINEMANN
1898

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TO

THE QUEEN OF ITALY

# TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

THE translator is too keenly alive to the charm of the original work not to realize that some of its elements must evaporate in the process of translation. Among these he accounts the contrast afforded by the modern colloquialisms of the Italian narrative to the archaic diction of the quotations by which it is enriched. By this perhaps unconscious artifice the voices of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are made to speak in the ear of the nineteenth, so bridging over the gap, that the author may well claim to have made tangible the great dim phantom of that wonder of her age, of whom a modern critic has happily said—*de son vivant elle devint mythe.*

The numbers of the documents quoted in the course of this volume refer to an appendix, which, besides letters and other documents, includes *Gli Experimenti* (some five hundred household and other recipes) of the Lady of Forli.—*Caterina Sforza, Vol. III., di Pier Desiderio Pasolini, Roma, Loescher.*

# PREFACE

A SHORT life of Catherine Sforza was written by Fabio Oliva towards the middle of the sixteenth century, and another, in three volumes 4to, less than a century ago by the Spanish Abbé Burriel, who, with others of his order and nationality, spent many years of exile in Forli.

To Burriel must be ascribed the merit of examining contemporary chronicles. But from lack of critical acumen, he failed to interpret and sometimes even to utilize them; in Catherine Sforza he was bent upon recognizing a second Countess Mathilda.

It has been my good fortune to read more than five hundred of Catherine's letters; Burriel never saw but one; all the correspondence which elucidates her history remained unknown to him, and he published few documents. Extensive research in various archives, Italian and foreign, has yielded a large collection of documents, enabling me to gradually complete and rectify the narrative of many episodes of the life of Catherine, and to relate others, hitherto unknown, of her early youth and her later years. The figure presented to us by the biographers is so intangible that we cannot grasp it, the one created by tradition melts under the test of documents. The legends have some, but not all of the elements of truth, and even this truth is vitiated, the exception standing for the rule, and fantastic stories for history.

The aim of the present book, which reproduces many of Catherine's letters, is to bring her nearer to us than has been done by any preceding work. The reader, to whom is revealed not only the life of the militant sovereign, but that of the private woman, will be the better able to judge of the moral significance of this historic figure, so famous and so little known.

PIER DESIDERIO PASOLINI.

ERRATA

page 9, last line but one, *read* Lucia da Torsana, an excellent helpmate
,, 39, descriptive names, No. 2, *after* Lungara *read* now Palazzo Corsini
,, 56, heading of Chap. VI, *for* August 1881 *read* 1481
,, 59, line 21, *for* twentieth *read* nineteenth
,, 59, line 25, *for* Leoni *read* Leone
,, 63, line 11, *for* setters *read* Segusian hounds
,, 239, line 5, *for* Fortunato *read* Fortunati
,, 275, line 1, *for* Imola *read* at Imola ; *for* whose poor lord doth at commend *read* doth commend
,, 334, line 9, *for* latter *read* former
,, 341, line 27, *for* Borsi *read* Bossi

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# BOOK I

## ORIGIN OF THE HOUSE OF SFORZA

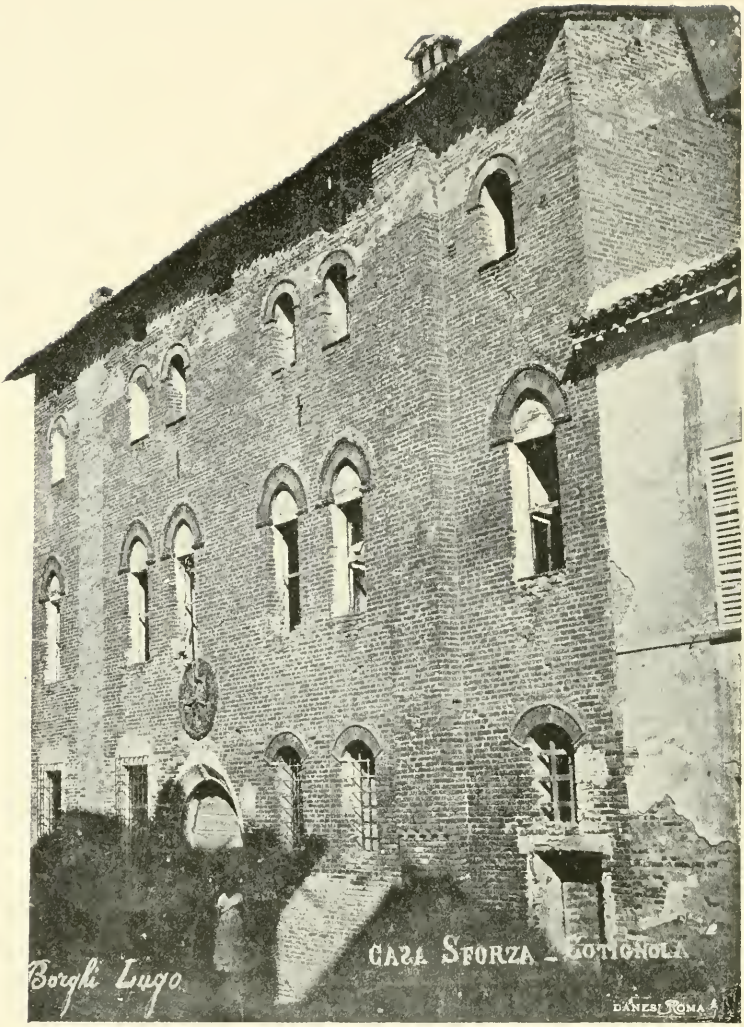
# CHAPTER I

## CATHERINE'S ANCESTRY

AT the latter end of the fourteenth century bands of foreign mercenaries roamed at will over the bloodstained lands of down-trodden Italy, fighting now for one prince, now for another. Indifferent to the rights or wrongs of those who paid them, they remained constant only in their desire to amass wealth; an ambition which in the case of their leaders, or *condottieri*, was sometimes supplemented and gratified by the acquisition of a State and the foundation of a princely dynasty.

The Italians, in course of time, followed their example. Alberigo da Barbiano, a young gentleman of Romagna, raised a banner with the motto: *Liber Ital. ab. exter.*, and by the union of rival factions opened a new field to the prowess and hopes of all. Little was heard, henceforward, of old feuds in the villages and castles of Romagna, where all were banded together in new aims. The movement spread rapidly; the boldest youths escaped from home, joined the nearest camp, and Italian companies, eager and in unison, prevailed against alien ones. Not only was the honour of Italian arms saved, but foreign hirelings were supplanted by Italian *condottieri*.

The most brilliant example of a movement that was individual rather than collective, military than national, is found in the family of the Attendolo-Sforza of Cotignola. Its members surpassed the most famous *condottieri* in war and statecraft, and in their history it is easier to follow the steps that led them to a principality than in that of any other Italian family.




HOUSE OF THE ATTENDOLO-SFORZA FAMILY, COTIGNOLA.

"Sforza (Muzzo from Giacomo or Giacomuzzo)[1] was born at Cotignola, an old community of the Romagna, close to the Via Emilia in the county of Faenza," writes Zazzera in his *Nobiltà d'Italia*. "His father was Giovanni of the Attendoli, a family of greater influence than nobility: of great wealth,



HOUSE OF THE ATTENDOLO-SFORZA FAMILY, COTIGNOLA.

however, and flourishing by reason of a numerous progeny given to the service of arms. His (Muzzo's) mother was

[1] This same account of his name and origin was given by "Muzio" Sforza to Robert of Bavaria, when the latter wished to grant him a new coat of arms, which would have connected him by descent with a city and a royal house of Dacia. Muzzo became afterwards corrupted into "Muzio" by adulators of the Sforza princes who affected to trace the descent of the great *condottiere* from Mutius Scævola.

Elisa, a woman of virile mind, of the clannish House of the Petrascini. . . . She gave birth to twenty-one children, whom she so educated that they set no store by ornate garments, delicate viands, nor soft beds; and all, being of a certain vigorous valour of mind, upheld the reputation of the family by frequently resorting to arms.[1] . . . At that time the halls and chambers in the houses of the Attendoli were not hung with tapestries, but with shields and armour; the beds were wide and without coverings. Therein slept troops of armed kinsmen, and all were so alert and hardy that, without either choice or order, they partook in common of the frugal viands that were served up to them by serving-boys and muleteers."

The education received by the Attendoli from their mother tempered and adapted them to those new times in which simple soldiers of fortune, from a little Romagnole village, could attain to the dominion of one of the foremost of European States. In the few generations in which the marvellous career of this family was developed, the ancestral type of Elisa was never lost: wives and sisters fought side by side with husbands and brothers, or in their stead, and by the renown of their valour and beauty upheld their State and lent security and honour to their lives. Their glory culminated in the heroic deeds of a warlike princess, the great-granddaughter of Muzzo or Muzio Attendolo, and the last, but perhaps the most perfect type of the knightly heroine of the middle ages.

One evening of the year 1382, Giacomo (Giacomuzzo) Attendolo, afterwards surnamed Sforza, was quietly digging the paternal land when he heard the sound of pipes and drums. Some soldiers of the company of Boldrino of Panicale had been sent into that country to recruit. Behind

[1] "For," continues Zazzera, "they had a mortal enmity to the Pasolini who were their equals; Martino Pasolino, head of that House, having forcibly detained a noble maiden with a great inheritance for her dower, who was affianced to Bartolo, brother of Sforza (Muzzo). For this reason they were wont to fall on each other as in veritable battle, and many were slain. In the end Martino, having lost his son and all his friends, was driven from the Commune." Zazzera, *Della Nobiltà d'Italia* (*della Famiglia Sforza*).

them he perceived some of his own companions who had been already enrolled. "O Muzzo!" (Giacomuzzo) cried the latter, "cast away your spade, and come with us to seek your fortune!" Muzzo threw his spade into an oak, meaning, if the spade fell, to take it up again for ever; if it stayed there, to be a soldier. The spade did not fall, and when night came, Muzzo fled from Cotignola, on one of his father's horses, and joined the camp.

Two years later Muzio[1] returned to visit his parents, but as his heart was ever with arms and armaments, his father said, "Be then a man of arms! go back to the camp and make thy fortune!" And he pledged a strip of land to buy him four horses and his arms. Muzio returned to the camp followed by a troop of his kinsmen, eager to acquire power and riches; his violence earned him the nickname of Sforza; bold and turbulent, he could scarcely endure to hear of the adventures of more fortunate *condottieri*. Broglio of Chieri was Lord of Assisi, Biordo of his native Perugia; Acuto (John Hawkswood), an Englishman, of Cotignola. Their success kept Sforza sullen by day and wakeful by night. "Am I not as good as these?" he asked himself. "May I not beat these strangers, who plunder our richest soil and capture our fairest cities?" For the cup was brimming over, and the foreign orgy was nearing its end. The butchery at Faenza (March 29, 1376), and the more horrible slaughter, by the Bretons and English, of Acuto, by command of Robert, Cardinal of Geneva, had stirred the whole peninsula. Romagna arose from that bath of blood with a sense of revolt against the foreign hordes, and of envy of the luck of their leaders. "But among all," says Giovio, "Alberigo Balbiano, illustrious by the splendour of his arms, inflamed him (Sforza) to follow the wars." Sforza and his Romagnole band went to swell the ranks of the company of St. George, composed exclusively of Italians who had sworn never to turn their backs upon the enemy. After these had, in more than one place, vanquished the Bretons, killed the French, beaten the Germans, broken the

[1] *Vide* note on Muzio (corruption of Muzzo) on page 5.

Spaniards, and routed the Savoyards and the English, they sufficiently proved that the Italians had still some claim to a reputation for valour. Thus the fortunes of the House of Sforza grew with the renascent glory of Italian arms.

Sforza was the greatest and most fortunate of *condottieri*—he fought for four popes and four kings. After the death of King Ladislaus of Naples he attached himself to Joan, his sister and successor, who "lived shamelessly, surrounded by a varied and ever-changing circle of lovers. . . . Sforza, a most gallant soldier, took his place among these." [1] Sforza was not without a certain rustic cunning, but "inexpert in intrigues and in the ways of Courts, he fell an easy prey to treason." [2] Pandolfo Alopo, his rival in the Queen's love, thrust him into prison, then appealed to him to help him to oppose Giacomo della Marca, whom Joan had chosen for her husband despite his age, "the better to manage and circumvent him." But the latter, who cared more for his crown than for his queen, deprived the unhappy princess of her power and tormented her; Alopo lost his head on the scaffold, and Sforza, in chains in a dungeon, awaited torture. The Virgin appeared to him and promised him that he should not suffer. Invoking her name, he resisted his tormentors, and the new King failed to extort from him the pass-words of the fortresses: he pined in prison, but faith upheld him.

The King sent to Tricarico to take possession of the city. Margaret, Sforza's sister, who was its ruler, met the King's envoys, sword in hand, and cast them into prison, vowing to hang them all by the neck unless her brother were set at liberty. Sforza was immediately liberated.

Sforza now strove to acquire riches as a means to power, but ever fearful of their influence, turned away his eyes from coin, lest the sight of heaps of gold should weaken him. He balanced his expenditure with the revenues of castles and stipends; he did not understand figures, yet never made a mistake in paying. He never failed his creditors, for he held that credit consisted rather in a loyal reputation than in ready

[1] V. Simonetta, *Vita di Francesco Sforza.* [2] Giovio.

money. When in need, no one was ever so rich as he "because of the singular esteem in which the bankers held him."[1] He never hesitated to shed blood, even by treacherous means, and his discipline with his soldiers was iron. He who stole forage was dragged by a horse's tail; traitors were hung to the roadside trees and their bones left to be picked by the birds; strokes were administered for a spot, or even a little rust on arms; they whose helmets were unadorned by a fine plume were hissed. His reviews were splendid and sumptuous. The horses' harness was gilt or enamelled in the Persian fashion, the trappings heavy with gold and silver embroidery. He tolerated neither gambling nor swearing in camp. On days of leisure, he practised gymnastics with the soldiers and proved his superiority in suppleness of limb and muscular strength. At night the legends of the paladins of France were read to the soldiers; he made generous offers to men of letters to translate for him the Greek and Latin historians, apologizing for his ignorance "in that he had not learnt to hold book and sword in the same hand." He wrote few letters and these in hasty and unformed characters, signed with a simple cipher that he had learned in the prison of Castel dell' Ovo. His table was hospitable, in his house he neither tolerated unbelievers, madmen, nor jesters. He attended mass every day and partook of the Communion once a year. He received and employed the old enemies of his family, but advised them not to return to Cotignola; for although he forgave them freely, there were those among his kinsmen who would neither forget nor forgive.[2]

Matrimony was, to this fighting peasant, who had cast away his spade in the hope of a sceptre, the most rapid way to riches and power. To this end, he did not hesitate to sacrifice the celebrated Lucia da Torsana, an excellent wife, who had already borne him Francesco and six other sons. When he

[1] Giovio.

[2] Among these was Martino Pasolino (head of a House with whom that of Sforza was at enmity), who, finding himself ruined and hunted from every refuge, cast himself in despair at the feet of Muzio, who immediately forgave and employed him. Doc. 1, 2, 3: Documents relating to "Experiments" of Catherine Sforza—Pier Desiderio Pasolini—Rome, Loescher.

became rich and famous, he no longer looked upon her as his equal, and wishing to be free to contract a princely alliance, he looked about him, until at fifty he succeeded in wedding the widow of Louis of Anjou, King of Naples. For the rest, his morals are in no way to be commended. When Francesco, his son, set out to make his fortune, he gave him the following advice: "Do not look at the wife of a friend; do not beat any one, or if you have beaten him, make your peace with him and send him far away; ride no horse that hath a hard mouth or a tender heel:" for these three things had endangered his own life.

On January 4, 1424, Sforza, then in his fifty-sixth year, gave battle to the Bracceschi at the mouth of the river Pescara. To complete his victory, there remained but to pursue the enemy. But a sudden wind blew from the north; the sea howled, the river swelled and some squadrons of horse, that were still on the other side of the river, hesitated to cross. Sforza, who had already crossed, signed to the soldiers and called to them by name; then, seeing that none of them ventured to move, dashed once more into the river as an example to those who were afraid. In mid-current he perceived that a beloved page who had followed him, bearing his helmet, had lost his saddle and was on the point of drowning. "Poor boy!" cried Sforza, "will no one help you?" Approaching him, he threw himself completely on one side, and by extending his arm succeeded in gripping the page by the hair. In doing this he unwittingly tightened his horse's rein. He rode a fine charger, of so delicate a mouth that it reared at the slightest touch of the bit; its hind-legs caught in the river mud and the rider was thrown. Unburdened of his weight, the horse swam to land. But Sforza, dragged down by the weight of his armour, disappeared where the rushing river lost itself in the waves and the roar of the sea.

Twice his mailed gloves were seen to rise out of the water and join. None dared to breast the current. His corpse was never found.

The Bracceschi had been already driven back within the

city of Pescara, when a runner arrived with the news of Sforza's death. From every side came cries of sorrow and discouragement. But Francesco, impassable, continued to give battle and held the command until the victory was complete.

Some hours later, when the wind was down and the water low, Francesco, the victor of the day, drew rein at the river-side. He consigned his horse to a squire, lest he should trample on the body of his father, sprang into a small ruinous boat, which he rowed with a branch he had cut from a tree with his sword, and kneeling, bareheaded, regardless of the enemy's arrows, crossed the river which had become his father's grave. He was immediately surrounded by Sforza's weeping soldiers. "Be faithful to me," he said, "as you were to my father; with God's help I will yet lead you to glory and fortune."

In that same January of 1424, Francesco, with a following of forty men-at-arms, offered his services as his father's successor to Queen Joan of Naples. The unhappy Queen, on seeing him, cried, weeping bitterly: "O Sforza, Sforza![1] your name at least shall live. Francesco Sforza, be Sforza the surname of your sons and brothers."

In Francesco was no trace of his father's rustic bearing; he had already won twenty-two battles, his achievements were as famous as those of his father before him, and no ambition was disproportionate to his merit. His constant aim was as his father's, a crown, and he pursued it by like means and with the same capacity. Matrimony was to complete what had been begun with valour and the fortune of arms. Bianca Maria, daughter of Philip, last of the Visconti, by his mistress, Agnese del Maino, conferred on him the rights and privileges of an old and princely name. At the time of the death of Duke Philip, Francesco and his wife were at Cotignola. He hastened with four thousand horse and two thousand foot soldiers to Cremona, a city that Bianca had brought him in dowry.

Maria of Savoy, widow of Duke Philip, who had subjected

[1] Sforza, a nickname acquired by Muzio Attendolo on account of his extreme violence and impetuosity.

her to many humiliations, was venerated by his subjects. She persuaded them to ally themselves with her brother, Ludovic, Duke of Savoy, an alliance which was to be frustrated by Bianca Maria, the daughter of her rival, who was determined not to lose the paternal heritage.

Francesco Sforza declared he would turn the Dukes of Savoy out of Italy and enrich his followers with the Piedmontese territory. He put to death soldiers and subjects of the Duke of Savoy, scoffed at the Duchess Dowager of Milan, and sent to advise the magistrates of that city to put no faith in the promises and fables of the House of Savoy. As Captain-general of the Milanese Republic, he had beaten the Venetians at Caravaggio. He then allied himself with them, turned upon the Republic and besieged Milan, which opened her gates to him after thirty months of anarchic liberty. On February 26, 1450, Francesco made his state entry. He ordered his soldiers to give up their bread to the starving populace, and refusing to enter the chariot, with its baldaquin of cloth of gold, which the Milanese had prepared for him, was almost carried into the Dome on horseback by the enthusiastic crowd which surrounded him too closely to permit of his dismounting.

The appearance of this typical warrior and prince of the fifteenth century is thus described in a letter of Pope Pius II. "Of tall and imposing stature and serious expression, ever calm and affable in speech; in truth, a princely bearing." None left him dissatisfied, nor were ever disappointed in him. He honoured men of virtue and merit; was benevolent and forbearing to the weak, of quick temper, but prompt to atone by acts of spontaneous kindness for offence given, deaf to malicious insinuations, careful of religious observance, just and unrevengeful. In the licence and cruelty of his times, Francesco Sforza, despite his ten natural children and more than one act of violence, was accounted humane, moral, and true to his given word.

At that time, diversity of faith and country divided the human family, but when the Duke had erected the chief hospital, he decreed that despite diversity of faith and country the sick

and maimed of all nations and creeds should be received there. The citizens often met him, walking with his children or riding to inspect the new buildings in progress. Like his father, he loved to dine in good company, but the ducal table was frugal. Besides his guests, any one might approach him at meal-times, when he would listen, with infinite courtesy and patience, to long stories of misfortune and continual appeals for help. He was a loving husband to Bianca Maria, of whom he was wont to say that, "of all the good things for which he thanked God, that for which he was most grateful was that he had been found worthy of such a woman, who had not her equal upon earth." Whence it will be seen, that in the family of these fortunate adventurers, although the end was often used to justify the means, and legitimacy of birth was regarded as a negligible quantity, many simple, domestic virtues went hand in hand with military fame and the pomp of power.

Bianca Maria Visconti was eight years old when she was affianced to Francesco Sforza. Later, her father betrothed her, for political reasons, to two other princes, but Bianca would wed none other than Francesco, so that on October 25, 1441, when he was forty and the bride seventeen, they were married. A year later, Francesco entrusted her with the government of the Marca d'Ancona. She was happiest in the midst of her soldiers, but to avoid slander did not appear in camp except when councils were held, or in moments of extreme danger. Hearing, while her husband was away fighting in Bresciana, that the castle of Monza had fallen into rebel hands, she started on foot, calling to her guard: "Let those who love me follow," and appearing suddenly, with her escort, in the rebel midst, obtained the immediate restitution of the castle. On another occasion, fearing that Francesco, wearied by continuous rain, would raise a siege, she joined him, and finding that he had placed seven cannons in position, persuaded him to add to them two others and to bombard day and night. The fortress fell, and Francesco declared that he trusted even more in his wife than in his army.

In 1448 Francesco was at war with Venice. The battle

raged under the walls of Cremona. Bianca, who was then twenty-three, mounted her horse, called the citizens to arms, and placing herself at their head, led them to the camp. "Mark, St. Mark!" cried a Venetian soldier, from a tower. Bianca threw her lance at him and he fell dead. The burghers of Cremona, led by the voice of their liege lady, fought until night, wherever the danger was hottest, and having beaten the Venetians, led her back in triumph to the city.

It was Bianca who, after the death of her father, advised her husband's alliance with the Venetians, and when the latter recalled their men and Francesco began to fear that their plan had fallen through, exhorted him "to fear naught, for the daughter of Duke Philip was capable of raising the spirits of the Milanese." When, during the siege of Milan, grain was selling at sixty ducats per measure, Bianca, by means of secret agents and letters, sent word to the people that they would be "blessed" if they summoned her and her "husband within their walls! Your Duke will be a father and brother to you!"

Francesco was summoned; Bianca recaptured the paternal State, and giving it to her husband, became the foundation pillar of Lombard statecraft under this new regimen, and beloved by her people, ever ruled them with justice. Many she freed from death, imprisonment and exile, and lavishly rewarded old servants and soldiers of her father.[1] "When reproached with being too munificent and generous," says Sabadino, "she replied, raising her beautiful white hands, laden with jewelled rings, that she could never do enough to satisfy her soul."[2]

Her greatest pleasure was to make peace where there had been discord. She gave money where she gave advice, and thus put an end to enmity with other miseries, provided dowers and arranged the marriages for the daughters of impoverished but deserving nobles, and albeit "was habited with such pomp and magnificence, that the like was never seen,"[3] fasted like a nun and visited the shrines, in and out-

[1] Sabadino de li Arienti, *Gynevera de la clare donne.* [2] *Ibid.* [3] *Ibid.*

side Milan, clothed like a penitent, barefoot, privately and in inclement weather.

A careful education, in the seclusion of the castle of Abbiategrosso, enabled the Duchess to direct the education of her children. "We must remember," she said to one of their learned teachers, "that we have to train princes, not *literati*." One of the themes she propounded to them was: "Of the manner, rules and artifices whereby the contracts between princes are made." The matter was to be treated in Latin by children from thirteen to sixteen. Ludovico il Moro was then nine. In a childish letter, written some years later from the country, Ludovic assures his mother, to whom he sends seventy quails, two partridges and a pheasant, that his love of sport (*caccia*) does not cause him to neglect his studies, "which will one day be very useful to him." Bianca divided her children's days into hours of study, hours for gymnastic and hours for military exercise. Some ladies of the Court were deputed to teach them good manners. They sometimes went on foot to pay visits to citizens of importance in their houses: they were expected to entertain the lords and gentlemen who came to Court from other cities, and to dance with their ladies.

When the life of Francesco was despaired of, Bianca, remembering that the Sforza sovereignty lacked the imperial sanction, recalled her eldest son Galeazzo from the war in Dauphiné: "It is our will," she wrote, "that immediately on receipt of this our letter you mount your horse and come away, flying, without any intermission of time." The Duke died on March 8, 1466. In the same night Bianca summoned the chief personages of Milan, took measures to frustrate any attempt to incite the people to rebellion, and wrote to the Italian Powers. She shed no tears, but her aspect compelled the pity of every witness. When her duties were fulfilled she went to pray by the corpse of her husband, where she watched for two days and nights and whence she had to be torn by force by the friends and doctors who surrounded her. Then only she lost her fortitude, and raining passionate tears and kisses on the dead face, upbraided herself for having some-

times opposed her lord, praying God to receive his soul in peace.

Bianca had saved the State for her son and shared its government with him so wisely that "all Italy spoke of her with reverence." But she soon became irksome to the new Duke, whose pride had been inflated by his marriage with Bona of Savoy, an alliance which made him brother-in-law to the King of France and son-in-law to that Duke Ludovic whom his father had threatened to turn out of Piedmont. His mother sought refuge from her humiliation in her own city of Cremona, where upon arrival she suddenly fell ill, and soon her life was despaired of. None ventured to tell the pious Duchess of her danger, until Michael Carcano (afterwards beatified), learning from the physicians that she could not outlive the following day, took heart of grace and said: "Gracious Lady, your hour is near." She calmly asked for the Sacrament, made her will and to Duke Galeazzo, who had hastened to her bedside, recommended her "Milanese and all our other subjects. But the Cremonese," she added, "who came to me as my paternal dower, I give and bequeath to thee." And having prayed him to so requite her household that none might say they had in vain spent time and service on her, and having blessed the Duke and her other children, "presently fell asleep."

The decadence of the race of Sforza began with Galeazzo, son of Francesco and Bianca, who inherited the paternal energy without its power of organization. To the vicissitudes of Romagna, Muzio owed his mental vigour; to the pursuit of war and the thirst of power, Francesco owed his firmness and the temperament that is born of a high ideal. Galeazzo, who ascended the throne at twenty-two, had never measured his strength with an enemy, an equal, nor a rival; unaccustomed to restraint, he was foolhardy, sensual and cruel. His violent nature was leavened by two weaknesses, inconstancy and vainglory, owing to which, the astute could bend his will to their own ends. His best adviser was Cicco Simonetta, who had been secretary to Duke Francesco. Popularity being the chief aim of Galeazzo, his first care was

to ensure the cheapness of victuals, and knowing that the people, next to abundance, cared most for public festivities, he determined that the Milanese should be proud of the splendour of his Court. He patronized and affected letters, and sought the praise of every kind of artist; he spent treasure on musicians, singers, sculptors and painters. But even as a Mæcenas he was mad and tyrannous; he ordered a room in the Castle of Porta Giovia (built, but not decorated by his father) to be decorated, in one night, with the portraits of the ducal family, their courtiers and pages.

Yet it was in the nature of things that, caring so much for praise, he should sometimes achieve that which was praiseworthy. Corruption existed no longer in the administration; there was discipline in the army and liberty in commerce. The prince's word was considered as good as his bond. But his life was a continual contradiction, because his acts did not spring from an innate sense of good. He offered his people abundance, feasts and cavalcades, yet wrote to his treasurer: "Have a care not to emancipate our subjects, like those of Savoy."

A contemporary defined him as "a monster compounded of virtues and vices;" the *Diario* of Ferrara is more explicit: "He was a man who committed acts of madness and things that cannot be written." Milanese licence was so unbridled that Galeazzo could abandon himself to any sort of profligacy without fear of endangering his popularity; his example not only corrupted manners, but principles; modesty was regarded as barbarism, husbands were honoured by the prince's irregularities, his favourites were the leading ladies of the capital; he did not hesitate to torture, mutilate, and bury alive any supposed rival in their fickle affections. A terrible suspicion cast its shadow over him; he was reputed to have poisoned Dorothea Gonzaga, his affianced bride, that he might be free to woo Bona of Savoy. The sudden and mysterious death of Duchess Bianca was ascribed to the same cause by the populace, and when they saw him hasten to her deathbed at the Castle of Melegnano, they recoiled from what they believed to be hypocrisy. The callousness with which

Galeazzo received official condolence confirmed this rumour, which is not justified by history, while proofs are not wanting that his mother died of a broken heart. "Mental anguish" wrote Bianca's physician to the reigning Duke, "is most conducive to bodily suffering."

Galeazzo had married Bona of Savoy in 1468. She is described by contemporaries (among whom was the Duke's brother, Tristan Sforza, his proxy at the wedding at the Castle of Amboise) as beautiful, gracious, gentle and in every way worthy of her name. By dint of tact and patience she obtained great influence over her erratic husband, and, shocked by his excesses, interceded between him and his victims. In 1474 the Sforza prisons and dungeons were crowded; in many places gallows were erected, and everywhere terror and indignation prevailed, when the Duke, "touched by the entreaties of the Duchess" (writes Campi), "caused a general pardon to be proclaimed;" a few were kept in chains, but no blood was shed. Bona, henceforward known as "the first Madonna of Italy," bore her husband five children: Giovan-Galeazzo, Alexander, Hermes, Bianca-Maria and Anna. His illegitimate offspring were Carlo, Octavian, Chiara, Galeazzo and one who must ever live in history as Catherine Sforza, not for having initiated a new era, but because she stands out from it, like a great figure from an older time.

# BOOK II

## CATHERINE'S GIRLHOOD

## CHAPTER II

### CHILDHOOD. MARRIAGE

THE name of Catherine Sforza is first mentioned in a letter written by Duke Galeazzo (then in camp with the Florentine and Neapolitan armies in Bolognese territory) to his mother. Catherine, who was in her sixth year, had been left in the guardianship of her paternal grandmother; she was ill, and as there was no improvement in her condition, two couriers had left Milan on the same day to convey news of the child. There was no mention of her mother. Duchess Bianca was then forty-one, still beautiful, although she had little more than a year to live, and an affectionate grandmother to the child of her son's first love, an error which had been quickly condoned by her, and had not scandalized any one else.

Catherine was born about the year 1463, in Milan or Pavia, where the ducal family spent part of the year. Her mother, Lucretia Landriani, was remarkably beautiful, but there is nothing to prove her possession of the intellectual gifts with which she is accredited by some historians. She plays no part either in the education or the history of Catherine, who was, however, constant in her love for her. She had several children: Bianca and Pietro were legitimate, not so Stella, who yet was no daughter to Galeazzo.

Galeazzo legitimized Catherine. On the death of her heroic grandmother she was adopted by Bona, his wife, who loved her as if she had really been her daughter, and educated her with maternal solicitude. Meanwhile her father, who intended her to serve his political aims, affianced her at the age of seven to Onorato, son of Count Marcantonio Torelli.

Onorato's early death paved the way to Catherine's higher fortune. Catherine's education was most elaborate: the Duke, her father, prided himself on his literary acquirements. His Court was thronged by scholars and humanists; the best masters were at hand, and the pupil was apt and of remarkable memory.

The princesses of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were generally educated with their brothers, the field of learning being limited to the study of the classics. Italian and Latin verse, written by the women of the period, is virile in character, and in no wise distinguishable from that of the men. The study of music, in which it does not appear that Catherine was proficient, was generally confined to the lute.

In the Italian Courts of the fifteenth century woman held a position equal to that of man—she was in every way his peer. Marriage, instead of blending two beings in one, united two equals, while enthusiasm for antique ideals and the conviction that classic culture was the principal ornament of life, made it essential to maidens who were destined to govern like men.

The first important event which can have been retained by Catherine's memory was her visit to Lorenzo Medici.

Galeazzo, conscious that the annexation of the county of Imola was obnoxious to the Medici, and desirous of averting a war with Florence, left, under the pretext of a pilgrimage to the Annunziata, for that city in March 1471 with his wife Bona and daughters Anna and Catherine. It would appear, from the sumptuousness of his travelling and hunting equipage and the splendour of the liveries and trappings of their numerous following, that Galeazzo challenged comparison with the magnificent Florentine, who received the ducal family in his own house, while the Court were lodged in the city at the expense of the Commune. Galeazzo was spellbound by the combination of magnificence and the highest art in Casa Medici. And the humour of the Florentines was so unconstrained in its gaiety that "if the said Duke found the town steeped in effeminate delicacy

and in customs opposed to those of every well-ordered city, he left it worse than he found it," says Machiavelli.

Genoa was not less splendid in her reception of the Duke and Duchess, but despite the warmth of the official reception, and the value and variety of the official presents, the tyrant betrayed his terror lest he should be assassinated, and after ordering the fortifications to be strengthened so that Genoa might continue to be held in subjection, Galeazzo, who had left Milan like a satrap, returned to it in fear and trembling, almost as a fugitive.

Thus Florence and the Medicean Court were the first spectacle witnessed by Catherine, destined to become a member of a family who were mortal enemies of the Medici, and to be a witness of her husband's conspiracy against, and punishment by, the Medici, without lessening the irresistible sympathy which attracted her to the Florentines. One of her sons took service under the Republic; she entertained Nicolò Machiavelli, a Medici was her last love, and as his widow she found her last resting-place in Florence, where a long line of her descendants became famous rulers in peace and war.

Pope Sixtus IV. resorted to princely alliances as a means of aggrandizement for his nephews. For Leonardo he had secured a daughter of the King of Naples, for Girolamo he sought an alliance with the reigning House of Milan and a State in Northern Italy. In December 1472, Girolamo Riario arrived in Milan from Bologna for the solemnization of his betrothal to Constance, daughter of Conrad Fogliani (half-brother of Francesco Sforza). The preliminaries were satisfactory to all parties until Gabriella Gonzaga, mother of the bride, demurred to some of the exactions of Girolamo, who was therein supported by the Duke of Milan. Galeazzo stormed, menaced and coerced in vain. Gabriella (on whom he afterwards revenged himself by a law-suit) remained unshaken and Catherine Sforza, in lieu of her cousin, was offered in marriage to Riario, who, placated by the promise of so much beauty and the prospect of a marriage in a

political sense more advantageous, concluded a hasty betrothal with Catherine at the Castle of Pavia on February 23, 1473. Three days later the bridegroom's gifts to the bride were consigned to Duchess Bona, in the presence of four Court officials, among whom was Pietro Landriani, Master of the Household and husband of the fair Lucretia.

The legal act of donation shows[1] that the gifts comprised two dresses, one of gold brocade and the other of green velvet, embroidered with 1538 large and as many small pearls, three rows of large pearls, two thimbles, set with diamonds, emeralds and sapphires, a jewel "in the form of a peasant," the head being formed by a large pearl, a jewelled clasp with a pear-shaped pearl for a pendant, two crosses set with diamonds, pearls and rubies, a purse of gold, seven girdles set in silver, and two pairs of sleeves of silver brocade.

In September of the same year Cardinal Pietro Riario, preceded by the fame of absolute power and regal magnificence, arrived in Milan as the Pope's legate, and was received with a pomp which could not have been exceeded had he been Pope. This young Cardinal had been instrumental at the conclave in the election of his uncle to the papacy. He had quickly risen to such power that he ruled the Pope and squandered an income of 60,000 gold florins in the most shameless profligacy.

No sooner had he arrived than he asked to see Catherine, by whose precocious beauty and talent (she was then eleven) he was so impressed that he lavished upon her caresses and presents. He confirmed the marriage contract that had been entered into the preceding year, stipulated that the bride's dowry of 10,000 ducats should be augmented by the Forest of Alexandria and that the town, lands and castle of Imola which the Duke had obtained from the Manfredi of Faenza, in defiance of the Medici, should become the property of the Church. To this Galeazzo agreed on the understanding that Imola should be the appanage of Girolamo Riario, as the Pope's vicar, and his heirs. The price of the

[1] Doc. 60, State Archives of Milan.

cession of this little State to the Church was 40,000 ducats. The Pope declared that the price was excessive and that the gift of Imola, which by right belonged to the Church, to Girolamo, went somewhat against his conscience, but he granted it because "it was not meet that the daughter of so great a prince should live like a simple gentlewoman." Thus Galeazzo secured the Pope's favour, the Pope had the satisfaction of regaining an ancient fief for the Church, of founding a State for Girolamo and of spiting Lorenzo Medici. On the 7th of the following November, Girolamo was invested with the County of Imola, paying a yearly tribute of two hundred instead of the five hundred ducats which the Church had levied from the Manfredi.

The Cardinal, contrary to the Duke's advice, left Milan for Venice, where he was again received with great honours. But his politics aroused suspicion, and the profligacy of his conduct, offence and scandal. He therefore fled to Rome in the disguise of a simple priest, after a five days' ride through Bolognese territory. He died in January 1474, at the age of twenty-eight, a victim to his own vices, or, as some people averred, to poison administered to him by an agent of the Signory of Venice. His death was hailed by many as a deliverance from a moral pest that had exceeded the licence and degradation of pagan Rome, but the populace, to whom his lavish expenditure had endeared him, mourned him, and the Pope, crying "My son and my hope!" wept so bitterly at his grave that a contemporary describes his grief as "undue."

So great was the instinct of family aggrandizement in Cardinal Pietro, that his last care had been for the future of his brother Girolamo, and on him the Pope concentrated henceforward all his affection. Catherine's affianced husband inherited all the riches of his brother, to whose diplomacy he already owed the dominion of Imola. In his hands was soon vested all military and ecclesiastic power, and he became the centre of the intrigues and political crimes of his day.

His primary need was a faction; he therefore assured himself of the Orsini and soon rose to such pre-eminence that he was known as the "Arch-Pope."

## CHAPTER III

### THE ASSASSINATION OF GALEAZZO

The tacit hate and bitter satire of the scholars and rhetoricians who at that time controlled public opinion, was aroused by the arrogance of Galeazzo, then in the full tide of his success. Among the most intolerant of the Duke's critics was Cola Montana, who had established a school of rhetoric in Milan in the year 1466. This man, without any common sense or even a conception of the logical sequence and inexorable law that govern events, felt himself called upon to reorganize society. He had been the tutor of Galeazzo and had later been found guilty of one of those offences which he most disapproved in the Duke. The latter, delighted in an opportunity of requiting the punishments inflicted on him by Cola, had him whipped in public. This increased his hatred of Galeazzo, which, owing to the vogue of classic literature and the examples of ancient Greece and Rome, passed for hatred of tyranny.

Cola never ceased in his attacks upon the Duke ; he inflamed the youth of Milan against his excesses and declared only those to be happy who lived under a republican government ; Catiline was his greatest hero, Sallust his favourite author, tyrannicide the supreme achievement of a life. Giovan-Andrea Lampugnani, reduced to a poverty which was insufferable to his pride, had been condemned to death by Francesco and pardoned by Galeazzo. Carlo Visconti could neither forget that the Sforza had usurped the honours of his family nor that the Duke had seduced his sister. Girolamo

Olgiati, a beardless youth, had no motive of personal hatred, but he saw with the eyes and heard with the ears of Cola, who, maddened by his dream of glory, promised these favourite disciples the fame of Brutus, Cassius and Catilinus. After discarding many plans for the suppression of the tryant, the conspirators agreed to await the occasion of a public festivity, whetting their thirst for vengeance, meanwhile, on a magnificently attired lay-figure of the Duke, on which, while heaping threats and insults, they made savage attacks,[1] so keeping their hands and nerves in readiness for the deed.

In December 1476, Duke Galeazzo had, in defence of Philibert of Savoy, partially repressed the invasion of Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, and sent his troops to their winter quarters to avoid the intense cold of the Piedmontese plains. He himself returned to Vigevano, with the intention of resuming hostilities in the spring. Christmas was at hand; it was the custom of the House of Sforza to celebrate it at home, a custom to which Duke Francesco, who, though dead ten years, yet lived in the loving remembrance of his people, had always adhered. Galeazzo, knowing that his acts would be compared with those of his father, felt that the maintenance and progression of the State was due to the initial impulse of its founder. He was thus driven, unconsciously, to imitate him even in unimportant details. He had been absent from Milan for some time and was flattered by the thought of returning to his capital as a conqueror.

Yet the mind of the young Duke was not attuned to these happy circumstances. A Milanese astrologer, a priest whom he had consulted, had foretold that he would not complete the eleventh year of his reign. The Duke had thrust him, with a loaf, a glass of wine and the wing of a capon, into a dungeon, where the wretched man had starved for twelve days. He died of hunger, but his prophecy survived him and the Duke could not be rid of it; the victory of his army left him as gloomy as before. There might be a refuge, he thought, in home and religion, and that was why he was

[1] Allegretto Allegretti, *Diarii Sanesi*.

returning, according to the custom of his father, to spend Christmas with his family and his people.

On mounting his horse, he perceived a comet and trembled ; then he learnt that his chamber had caught fire at Milan : a secret impulse, says Corio, warned him to proceed no farther. Still, he put spurs to his horse, and no sooner had he started than three crows flew over his head. He called for a cross-bow and shot two arrows at the ill-omened birds, but missed them. Assailed by an inexplicable discouragement, he hesitatingly proceeded, reaching Milan on December 20. He crossed the drawbridge with bent head, his gloom diffusing itself among his slow and silent following, and as the last of the long line of men-at-arms and caparisoned horses disappeared behind the iron gates of the Castle of Porta Giovia, the bridge was again drawn up. The Duke's first order, on dismounting, was that the singers should be dressed in mourning for mass on the following day, and be forbidden to sing any but the most solemn chants.

On the morning after Christmas-day, an icy frost hung over Milan. It was St. Stephen's day, and Duchess Bona had had an evil dream ; she saw the body of a murdered man in the church of St. Stephen. She arose hastily and besought the Duke not to attend mass in that church, nor to show himself in the streets of Milan. The Court chaplain had already gone to St. Stephen's with the sacred vessels, but the Bishop of Como, invited to celebrate the mass in the castle chapel, sent to say that he was ill. The Duchess again tried to dissuade her husband from leaving the castle, and entreated the principal members of his suite to prevent his so doing. The Duke put on a coat of mail, but took it off again "because it made him too stout." He was afraid and yet anxious to go to church, because he "was awaited there by some of his mistresses and others who from decorum I refrain from writing of," writes his faithful valet. The Duke halted at the top of the stairs as if he had forgotten something. He sent for his children, whom he wished to see again, and to Corio, who saw him, with a child on either side, at a

window, it appeared "that he could hardly tear himself away from them." At last, he left the castle on foot, but finding the ground frozen, decided on mounting his horse. All the courtiers sprang into the saddle, only the valet, Bernardino Corio, chief narrator of this episode, remained on foot and, taking a short cut, reached the church of St. Stephen in time to see the arrival of the cavalcade.

At midday, the cavalcade entered the most populous quarter of the city, and was soon surrounded by a motley crowd of nobles, doctors, lawyers, ecclesiastics and the populace, the men huddled in their dark cloaks and the women gay with their brightest colours. Here was the ducal guard, here were the equerries, here at last was the Duke himself, riding between the orators of Ferrara and Mantua. The people pressed closer to their prince, and noting his hard-set face, and the gloom in his eyes, muttered, "*Uh! come sta duro!*" ("How grim he looks.") Corio met Giovanni Lampugnani, arm-in-arm with Girolamo Olgiati, at the church door. "They wore coats and stockings of mail and short coats of crimson satin." Corio, knowing them to be members of the Court, wondered to see them there, instead of with the Duke's escort. Lampugnani and Olgiati, with whom were three ruffians of the lowest class, placed themselves on the right-hand side of the door; Carlo Visconti, who did not wish to be seen, on the left, behind a group of unknown persons. The sound of voices, the tramp of horses mingled with the clink of arms, and the towering plumes of the Sforza cavalry came in sight: then they heard the quick step of the Duke's horse, who stopped suddenly, when Galeazzo Maria, in the beauty and strength of his thirty-two years, drew rein, and giving his horse to a Moor, entered the church to the strains of *Sic transit gloria mundi*.[1] What had happened? The two silent groups on each side of the door pressed forward, almost barring the Duke's way. Lampugnani came forward, as if to drive them off, crying, "Make way, make way!" Arriving within touch of the Duke, he lifted his velvet beret with his left hand, and bending one knee as if to

[1] *Annales Pulcentini.*

present a petition, thrust his dagger through the Duke's body and into his throat as he fell. Then came Olgiati, with another dagger, and Visconti with a third, while a certain Francione dealt him the most deadly blow of all, in the back.

The Duke lay on the ground, in the midst of assassins, under a shower of blows: he expired with a faint cry, "O! Our Lady!" "Dead, dead!" cried the crowd. The second to fall was Francesco da Ripa, a colossal equerry, who had drawn his sword on the assassins. The faithful Moor dispatched Lampugnani, who had taken refuge among the frightened women, and having caught his foot in one of their trains before he could join his horse, was speared by the slave and dragged by the feet through the streets by the crowd until he was torn to shreds. Jewels were snatched from the hair, the necks and arms of the gaily-attired ladies. A scene of indescribable violence ensued until the pikes and halberds of the ducal guard parted the crowd and secured the murderers, with the exception of Olgiati and Visconti, who had succeeded in making their escape. Soon eleven corpses were to be seen hanging from the ramparts of the castle, while others were quartered alive within the city, so that the people might hear the last desperate cries of the prisoners. At night the Duke was quietly laid to rest in the Dome, habited in a garment of cloth of gold which he had given to his wife to keep for his shroud, in case of sudden death.

A few days later Carlo Visconti was taken, tortured and quartered alive. Girolamo Olgiati, accursed by his father and abandoned by his friends, fell into the hands of the ducal executioners, and amid torments which dislocated his bones and tore his flesh, was commanded by his judges to reveal the plan of the conspiracy in writing to Duchess Bona. In the course of his confession he said: "We did to the Duke that which we had prepared. Now, owing to his cruelties and lasciviousness, he lies there dead, a proof to tyrants that justice still exists . . . and now to Thee, Holy Mother of God, and to thee, Duchess Bona (however guilty I may appear in thine eyes), I bend the knee, I implore of your clemency and benignity to be pleased to remember that I too

have a soul, that you may leave to these miserable members enough of strength for me to make fitting confession of my sins."

Duchess Bona sent a priest to him, to persuade him to save his soul by one word of penitence. But in broken and almost inarticulate accents, he said: "I know that by my sins I have deserved even greater torments, could my body but bear them . . . but I trust that the holy deed for which I die will obtain mercy for me at the hands of the Supreme Judge. And were I to be reborn ten times and ten times to perish in these torments, I would give my blood and all my strength for this sacred end." Mangled, under the knife of the executioner, a loud cry escaped the unfortunate young man. "Be of good cheer, Girolamo!" he cried to himself, "*Mors acerba, fama perpetua. Stabit vetus memoria facti!*" A portion of his body was hung to each gate of the city, and his head exposed on the tower of Broletto Nuovo.

Duchess Bona appealed to the Pope for the posthumous absolution of the man whom, despite the multitude and enormity of his crimes, she, "next to God, had loved above all else in the world," promising to make reparation, either by giving all she could to the subsidy demanded of princes by the Church, or by the erection of monasteries, donations to the hospital, or in dowries to marriageable maidens and other pious works within the State of Milan. "This she would prefer; being of opinion that reparation is most due, and good should follow evil, on the spot where it has been committed," adding that she was willing in her own person to endure such fast, penance, or torment as could avail the soul of her husband.

"The peace of Italy is at an end!" exclaimed Pope Sixtus IV. on hearing of the murder of Galeazzo, whose death, although he had neither been a saint nor a great politician, was indeed the prelude to fresh bloodshed, civil war and foreign invasion.

## CHAPTER IV

### FROM MILAN TO ROME

CATHERINE, who at the time of these events was fourteen, wept for her father and herself. Who now would ensure the happiness to which she had looked forward? The coming of Cardinal Riario, with his splendid following, had appealed to her imagination; this splendour had seemed to her to eclipse the magnificence of the Milanese Court and yet it was but a spark of a much more glorious flame. There was a more splendid Court than that of her father, there was a greater and more powerful sovereign than the Duke of Milan: he who held, besides the sceptre, the keys of Paradise. That Court should have been her home: she had been destined to be the most holy niece of the sovereign pontiff, at whose feet she would have seen emperors and kings kneel. She had felt that all the princesses of Italy must envy her! Now, the daggers of a handful of wretched madmen had imperilled all.

But it was not so. For the death of Galeazzo inspired the Pope and Girolamo Riario with a momentary hope of obtaining possession of Milan, and in February 1477, the papal legate, Cardinal Mellini, arrived with instructions to hasten the marriage. Duchess Bona, who had always loved Catherine, most amply fulfilled her husband's promises: early in April, in her presence, that of the Cardinal and the assembled Court, Catherine's marriage was celebrated, by proxy and without any public rejoicing, on account of the recent death of the Duke.

The first of Catherine's letters which exists reached Duchess Bona towards the end of that month. It ran as follows:

"Most Illustrious and Most Excellent Madonna!

"Be it known to Your Grace that by the grace of God, to-day I arrived at Parma well, and withal afflicted at being far from Your Grace and to be incapable of narrating and expressing, with other benefits I owe to Your Grace, the great honours and goodly companies that have followed me from place to place, *adeo*, it would be a great thing to write them, and especially in this Your city of Parma, to whom (*sic*) on bended knee I do commend myself.

"Ex. Parma die XXVII. Aprilis 1477.

"Vestra servitrix et fillia

"Caterina Vicecomes."

On the same day, after describing to her sister Chiara the great feasts that everywhere had been given in her honour, she adds that she was well *et schonsolata* and sends affectionate greetings to her nurses and "in general to all my women." On the 28th she was at Reggio, on the following day at Modena, where there was a solemn reception and many visits; her gentlemen in waiting had advised her how to receive them, which had been "little trouble because of her great intelligence and discretion." At Bologna she was entertained by Giovanni Bentivoglio. On May 1, before sunset, she made her state entry into Imola.

The people had come out in masses to meet her, the Ancients of the city presented her with the keys, all along the streets from the gates to the palace the arms of the Pope, the Sforza, and the Riario were garlanded with flowers; allegorical groups were formed and children sang verses and sonnets. A great pavilion, ingeniously decorated with many-coloured draperies, banners and arms, had been erected in front of the palace; under this pavilion Catherine and her suite dismounted, when the crowd rushed in, disputing "with cries, blows and much tearing of hair" the honour of seizing the lady's horse, according to the custom of the time. The confusion which resulted from so much popular enthusiasm "was not displeasing" to Catherine. Under the pavilion,

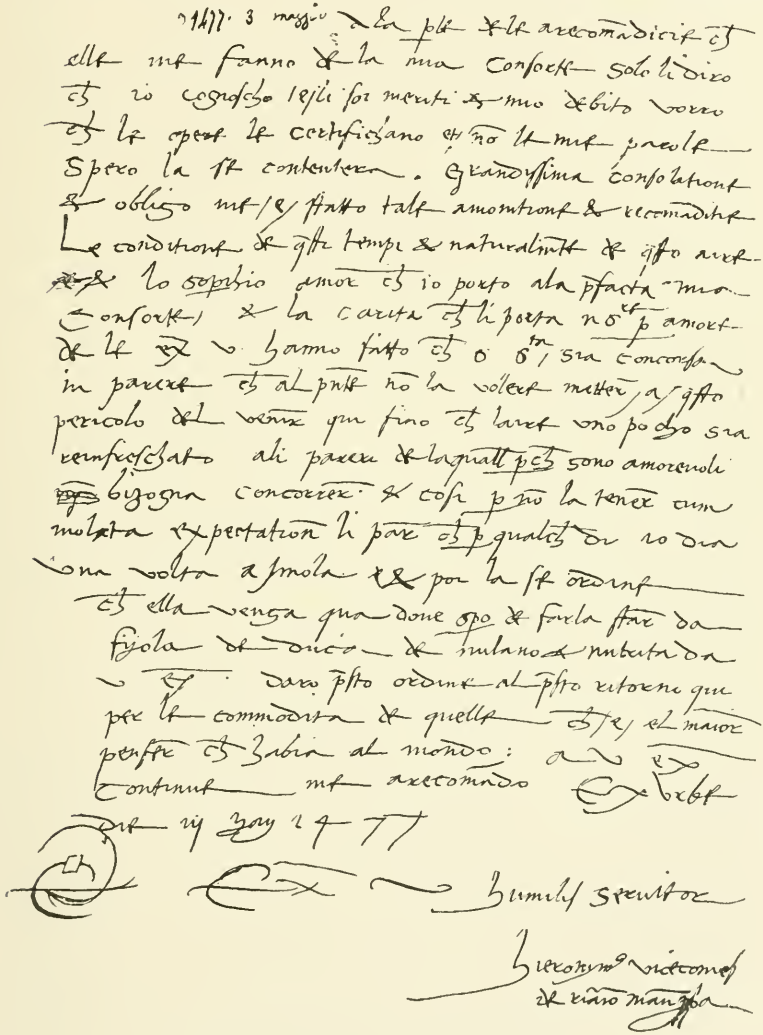
Violantina Riario-Ricci, wife of the governor of Imola, surrounded by many ladies, received her sister-in-law, and led her within the palace, which was furnished with beautiful tapestries and hangings embroidered in gold and silver and hung with crimson velvets and satin and white damask silks. But what most attracted the admiration of the Milanese was a *credenza*, or cupboard, of great height and beauty, laden with artistically wrought silver, a costly gift of the Pope to Count Girolamo. Imola in its outward aspect was pronounced small and badly built, while the fortress, a recent construction of the Duke of Milan, was admired; the citizens, and especially the women, were well dressed and the dancers in the streets "with their many curtseys, bows, exchanges and shuffling of the feet" were singularly quaint.

Catherine was permitted to rest in her chamber,[1] the roof and walls of which were hung with white silk, brocaded with gold, while her suite were conducted over the other magnificent apartments, which seemed to be endless, returning to conduct Catherine to a collation, after which Catherine shook hands with some of the ladies who had received her and dismissed them, inviting others to sup with her. After supper, as Catherine, although in good health and spirits, was "somewhat weary," the guests were permitted to retire, the foreigners being escorted, with many torches, to their apartments or to the lodgings allotted to them in the town. On May 2 Catherine attended mass and entertained some citizens and ladies to dinner; on the 3rd, which was market-day, the town was full of country people who had brought presents of comestibles to their new lady and succeeded, through the mediation of a jester named Piasentino, in being admitted to her presence. She gave her hand to each of the peasants, who shared the enthusiasm of the populace and citizens for the youthful Countess.

"They never cease from feasting me," wrote Catherine to her sister, "even the stones rejoice because of my coming." She hoped to leave for Rome on the following Tuesday, and

[1] Narrative of some gentlemen of Catherine's suite, *Librairie Nationale*, Paris, Doc. 91.

begged her sister to send her a certain cap which had been given to her by "the wife of Don Ciccho" (Simonetta). Meanwhile because of the insanitary condition of Rome at that



AUTOGRAPH LETTER OF GIROLAMO RIARIO.

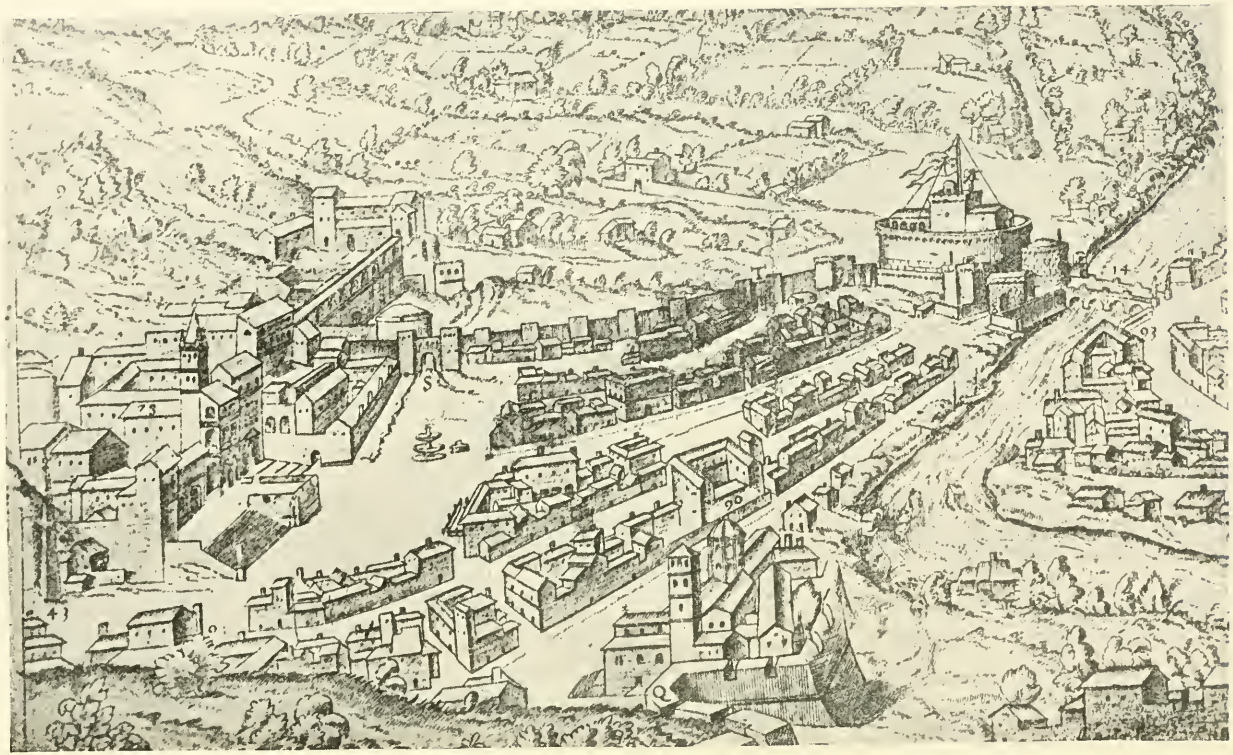
season, and because the recent death of Duke Galeazzo would cast a gloom over the projected festivities, the Pope had

decided to send Count Girolamo on a short visit to his subjects, to console his bride for the postponement of her triumphal entry. This plan fell through by reason of a conspiracy of the Venetian patriarch and the cardinal of San Pietro in Vincoli (later Pope Julius II.) against the life of the bridegroom. It appears from the letters of the Orator of Milan to his Government and from one of Girolamo Riario to the Duchess of Milan, that Rome was in a state of ferment, malaria, hunger and sedition ; the populace were capable of the utmost violence; it would not do for the bride to arrive at so inauspicious a time. But these injunctions did not reach Imola until after the departure of Catherine and her suite, on May 13, who riding onwards through the provinces of Romagna and La Marca, acclaimed and feasted at every resting-place, reached Castel Novo, belonging to Stephen Colonna, on the 24th and there halted for the night. She was within fourteen miles of Rome. Departing thence after dinner on the following day, at the eighteenth hour, they rode for seven miles and were then met by Count Girolamo, escorted by a goodly following of his friends and servants, all habited alike in sable velvet and satin. The bride and bridegroom "dismounted, and taking each other by the hand, tenderly kissed and embraced." They all rested in a wood, and after an interchange of elaborate courtesies, remounted their horses and once more turned towards Rome.

The first to join the united cavalcade was the Pope's nephew, Antonio Riario; at every succeeding quarter of a mile, they were joined by prelates and members of the households of cardinals. Within three miles of the city the Prefect of Rome, the ugly and wicked Leonardo, elder nephew of Sixtus, brought a great company to pay homage to the bride. At Ponte Molle, on the Tiber, they were met by the papal Court and, turning to the west, by the ambassadors of Naples and Spain, who, joining the cavalcade, escorted the bride to the palace of the Cardinal of Urbino at Monte Mario. Here the bride and bridegroom dismounted and supped (before sunset), the escort and the horses returning to the city. After supper, the Count, who was recalled to Rome by the Pope, presented

his wife, on leaving, with a necklace of pearls "with a pendant jewel of the value of 5000 ducats."

"Next day, being Pentecost" the horses were again led up to the door and Catherine, surrounded by her Milanese and escorted by the ambassadors and cavaliers as on the preceding day, by Gianfrancesco Gonzaga and several members of the Orsini and Colonna families, mounted hers. She wore "a cloak of black damask, brocaded with gold, a skirt of crimson satin and sleeves of black brocade and was splendidly adorned with jewels." The road to St. Peter's (a distance of two miles) was lined with spectators on horseback. Passing through the Porta Angelica and dismounting at the ancient Basilica (soon to be pulled down and rebuilt by Julius II.), Catherine was led to where Sixtus IV., in pontifical vestments, sat surrounded by the whole of the Sacred College. The mass lasted three hours. Then a young cardinal of thirty-four, Julian della Rovere (Cardinal of San Pietro in Vincoli, afterwards Pope Julius II. and the same who was suspected of connivance with the Venetian patriarch against his cousin's life), approached the bride who, attended by her suite, Count Girolamo and the orators of the Duke of Milan, was led by the Cardinal to the Pope: a rugged, ill-built, monkish figure surmounted by an austere, expressive face, with a hooked nose and piercing eyes. The tall, slim figure of Catherine emerged from her surrounding escort and kneeling before the awkward figure that seemed so ill at ease in the heavy pontifical garments, kissed the foot of Sixtus IV. "When she had arisen, Bossi, Orator of the Duke of Milan, read the Pope a lengthy Latin address on the virtues of the youthful Countess," upon which, contrary to all precedent, he was complimented by the Holy Father, who commanded him to take Catherine by the hand, spoke the sacramental words and allowed Girolamo to place the ring on her finger. Catherine again kissed the Pope's hand and foot. The Pope, among other affectionate courtesies, said to her that "he would marry her over again, and causing her to remove the chain of pearls given to her by my Lord the Count, put in its place another, all set with most precious jewels, valued at 4000 gold ducats,




PANORAMA OF ROME IN THE TIME OF CATHERINE SFORZA. (*Published in the Fifteenth Century.*)

9. The Vatican with Basilica of St. Peter.
14. Bridge of St. Angelo.
15. Bridge of the Vatican.
43. Obelisk of the Vatican.
78. Palace of the Vatican.
90. Casa Salviati.
91. House of Cardinal Cesi.
93. Casa Altoviti.
Q. Porta Santo Spirito.
S. Porta San Pietro.
T. Porta Angelica.

with so many caresses that it appears to us that Her Ladyship is so well beloved by His Holiness, that he makes no difference between her and my Lord the Count"—who seemed to the narrator[1] cold in comparison. Catherine, instructed by Bossi, then kissed the hand of each cardinal,




PANORAMA OF ROME (PART II.).

1. Palazzo Orsini at Campo di Fiore.
2. Villa Riario at the Lungara (no Palazzo Coesini).
3. Monte Aventino.
16. Ponte Sisto.
41. Circo Flaminio.
82. Casa Farnese.
83. Casa Capoferri.
86. Casa Mattei.
87. Orchards of the Riario.
88. Villa of Agostino Chigi (later Farnesina).
P. Porta Settimiana.

who one and all declared themselves her servants, the Pope blessed and dismissed the escort, who then escorted the bride and bridegroom to the palace of Cardinal Orsini, in Campo

[1] Doc. 105, Lib. Nat. Paris.

di Fiore, which had been prepared for Catherine pending the completion of the improvements begun at the Riario palace, in view of the postponement of Catherine's entry. The streets that led to Campo a Fiore were decked with "woollen draperies" and the arms of the Pope, the Riario and the Duke of Milan in leaves and flowers; perfumes were burnt and the air was redolent of sweet odours; the spacious court of the palace, hung with rich stuffs, led to apartments sumptuously furnished, and sumptuous were the dresses of the eighty Roman ladies who received Catherine. Even the chambers prepared for the Milanese suite were of princely magnificence. At the seventeenth hour, a child, habited as an angel, announced in verse that dinner was ready; Catherine entered the dining-room, water for the hands was handed to each guest, and to the table of the bride and bridegroom were bidden Antonio Riario, "the despot of Morea," the Bishop of Parma, who was one of the Milanese orators, the French Ambassador, Gianfrancesco Gonzaga, the wife of Giovanmaria Visconti, the wife of Fioramonte and the wife of the nephew of the Cardinal of Milan. At the other tables were prelates, ambassadors, lords and ladies, in all about two hundred persons. There were twenty-two courses, besides the sweets, and between every five courses a child recited verses from a triumphal car that was led in by several persons, while others represented classical subjects, such as the adventures of Medusa, Hercules and Theseus, dancers performed a ballet, a "moresca" and a Florentine dance, and six children, dressed as hunters, brought Catherine a quantity of cooked animals, "all served in their natural forms." The banquet lasted five hours, the guests were only kept awake by the novelty and variety of the entertainments. The presentation of gifts by the guests began as soon as the table-cloths were removed, and Catherine's presents were valued at 12,000 ducats. The effect produced by this welcome is reflected in a letter, written from Milan by Duchess Bona to her adopted daughter:

"DOMINÆ CATHERINÆ:

"*Magnifica filia nostra dilectissima.* We cannot say

with what great pleasure We have learnt of the honours and of the gracious reception accorded to thee by His Holiness and the whole Court of Rome. We hold all this as if it had been done to Ourselves, by reason of the singular love we bear thee. And although We suffer from the privation of thy sweet company, none the less, whenever We are reminded of the happiness of thy estate We experience an incredible consolation, to which nothing is wanting but the sight of thee. And We are assured that thou hast the same desire to see Us, which at this present cannot be. Therefore We exhort thee to be of good cheer and brave heart, assuring thee that this is the greatest pleasure thou canst procure to Us. We send thee three of the girdles thou didst order when here: and will send thee anything else from here, at thy pleasure."

In another letter the Duchess assures Catherine that "When we hear thee well spoken of, We experience the happiness which cometh to every good mother in the happiness of a dear daughter, such as thou art to Us." This correspondence bears the stamp of a pure and simple domestic life and proves that Catherine, whose virile qualities were destined to astound her contemporaries, was, in her early youth, a gentle and affectionate maiden. Of her appearance on the occasion of her official entry into the capital of Christianity, Fabio Oliva writes as follows: "That which was most remarkable in the diversity and multiplicity of spectacles was the rare and incomparable beauty of Catherine and her almost miraculous grace. . . . ."

# BOOK III

## CATHERINE AND THE RIARIO

# CHAPTER V

## WHO WERE THE RIARIO?

THE Riario were the favourite nephews of a new pope, who was the daring and ill-starred initiator of a new era. On the death of Paul II., Duke Galeazzo Maria had sent a list of cardinals, friendly to him, to his orator in Rome, requesting him to do everything in his power to secure the appointment of one of them to the papacy. Among these was the Cardinal Francesco della Rovere, a learned Franciscan, a native of Savona, a city subject to the Duke. At the same time the Duke sent an envoy to Rome, with instructions that were too secret to be written, and so much influence was brought to bear on the Conclave that Della Rovere assumed the tiara with the name of Sixtus IV. on August 9, 1479. During the ceremony of taking possession of the Lateran, the populace revolted and attacked the litter of the new pope with stones.

Sixtus, who combined a common exterior with an uncommon egotism and a strong mind, was unscrupulous, intolerant of contradiction, and imbued with unbounded ambition for himself and his family. He was the son of a poor Ligurian fisherman and was, at the time of his exaltation, in his fifty-eighth year. He immediately provided his fifteen nephews with honours and riches. Julian (afterwards Julius II.), a sinister and dissolute man, generally considered insignificant, was made cardinal and Bishop of Carpentras. But the Pope, having but little regard for him, advanced another nephew, Pietro, to the titles and benefices of Cardinal of San Sisto, Patriarch of Constantinople, Archbishop of Florence, Seville and Mendes and Bishop of Treviso. His premature end has been chronicled in these pages.

The blind affection of the Pope for this young man might have been explained by the services he was known to have rendered in the Conclave, but public rumour accounted for it by other reasons of a scandalous nature. Both he and his brother Girolamo, known to be the sons of the Pope, were the reputed or adopted children of Bianca, the Pope's sister and Paolo Riario, a middle-class citizen of Savona. Girolamo, Catherine's husband, who was perhaps the worst member of his clan, had been a clerk in the custom-house of Savona, until Sixtus summoned him to Rome. His rugged and savage nature recoiled from things ecclesiastic, yet he was keenly alive to the advantages pertaining to cope and mitre. Although violent and uncultured, his arrogant, impetuous temperament appeared to Sixtus to be adapted for power. Not venturing to begin by making a prince of him he made him Captain-general of the papal forces and Governor of the fort of Sant Angelo. Girolamo, as pivot of the Church's temporal power, drew large revenues and availed himself of every opportunity of acquiring riches, influence and power.

The avarice of Paul II. had scandalized Christendom; he had accumulated treasure without spending any part of it and had been heard to declare, more than once, that his treasure chests contained fabulous sums. Sixtus only acknowledged to have found 5000 florins in the treasury, but his nephews, who astounded Italy and the whole of Europe by a luxury so sudden and unbridled, made it patent to all that their uncle had permitted them to rifle the hoards of the Church.

This was the beginning of that deplorable epoch in the annals of the papacy which included the whole of our heroine's political career, in the course of which we meet with three popes, all of them famous in the sinister light of the Church's history. Although Catherine was the idol of one pope and the victim of another, her robust piety never permitted her to doubt the divineness of their mission, while she ascribed to human frailty the manner in which they exercised it.

The papal bulls, and other documents which have been handed down to us, prove that even the worst popes, judged from their conduct as men and princes, were dogmatically

irreproachable with regard to their guardianship of the Church's traditions. It is for this reason that ecclesiastical corruption could not undermine the Christian conscience: the evil times of Sixtus IV., Innocence VIII. and Alexander VI. passed like a summer storm which every one knows to be circumscribed within our terrestrial sphere, while overhead remains the peace and the eternal light of heaven.

In the reign of Sixtus, there appeared with the secularization of the papacy a new phenomenon, a new disease: Nepotism; the outcome of an alliance between celibacy and that family instinct which prompted the popes to found a nepotistic dynasty. The popes, being debarred from conquest or colonization, could only establish a family State by plundering the Church, and therefore elected to alienate from her possessions the province of Romagna, which long misrule and ferment had fitted more or less for new methods of government.

Sixtus IV. was the first of a line of popes in whom the princely prevailed over the sacerdotal character. "This pontiff," says Machiavelli, "was the first who revealed the full extent of pontifical power, and how many things, which hitherto have been regarded as errors, may be hidden under its authority." During the reign of Sixtus, the papacy fell into great discredit. The number of pilgrims had dwindled in the jubilee of 1475, and the few who came found the *curia* given up to usury, simony and traffic in office. A garment of paganism at once profaned and adorned the Holy City.

At the time of the election of Francesco Rovere, Italy civilized, or at least vivified, by classical reminiscence, had feared that she might be thrust back into the barbarism of the past by the monkish austerity of this poor Franciscan: a false alarm! for the new Pope was too ambitious not to be imbued with the spirit of his time. He built the bridge of San Sisto, the churches of Santa Maria della Pace and Santa Maria del Popolo; the Hospital and Tower of Santo Spirito; the Sixtine Chapel; restored the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius, and for the decoration of the new edifices summoned to Rome Mantegna, Perugino, Botticelli, Ghirlandaio, Melozzo of Forli, Filippo Lippi, Luca Signorelli and

others, uniting them in the confraternity of St. Luke. He founded the library of the Vatican, patronized letters and furthered the triumph of humanism.



THE LIBRARIAN PLATINUS BEFORE SIXTUS IV.

*The figure behind the kneeling Platinus, with hands hidden, is Girolamo Riario.*

In 1495, King Ferdinand of Naples advised the Pope to widen the streets and pull down the towers, loggias, balconies and other projections likely to facilitate disturbances. "You

will never," he said, "be master of Rome while the women, by throwing down stones, can put to flight your best soldiers;" and the Pope decided to follow this advice, if only to abolish the cause of much pestilence. But Sixtus IV. did not attempt this great undertaking until five years later, when he created a magistracy of public works, with power to purchase and pull down houses wherever it might be necessary to enlarge the streets, some of which were too narrow for two horsemen to ride abreast. When Catherine entered Rome, it was dark and uninhabitable. During her sojourn, it became gradually transformed into the splendid and artistic capital of Christendom. The pontificate of Sixtus IV. was glorious in the annals of art. With a change in politics came a change in the social life of Rome: banquets, sumptuous hunts, and nightly revels which, under the predecessors of Sixtus, would have been the cause of scandal, became the habitual recreations of high ecclesiastics and an acceptable spectacle to the populace. Sixtus was wont to say that the hand, ink and paper of the Pope sufficed to procure any given sum of money, and was so forgetful of his sacerdotal character as to be called the first pope-king.

For many years there had been no princess on the steps of the papal throne, and the Riario were too unpolished, the *curia* too corrupt to be influenced by the charm of a daring, honest and beautiful woman. Catherine's influence was very limited during the lifetime of Sixtus IV., whatever later historians may say to the contrary. The harsh and discourteous Pope cannot have inspired her with any sympathy, nor could the descendant of famous *condottieri* delight in Girolamo, her husband, who, cowardly as he was violent, was always surrounded by ruffians, being too much hated to trust himself in the streets of Rome alone. A certain proud conception of her personal dignity saved her from being corrupted, and the dreams of an ever-soaring ambition enabled her to endure the moral filth which surrounded her. Her ambition bound her to her husband: she would have preferred him valorous and popular, yet found consolation for his baseness in his power and the fear it inspired.

One of the most important factors in the life of Girolamo Riario was the conspiracy of the Pazzi, which ended in the tragedy of Santa Reparata. This conspiracy which was, in a measure, an imitation and consequence of the one in which Galeazzo Maria had perished, was headed by Sixtus IV. in alliance with the King of Naples, at the instigation of Girolamo Riario, and formed in opposition to the *Lega*. This league included the powers of Milan, Venice and Florence, where the Medici were no less hostile to the Pope's transformation of the States of the Church into an absolute monarchy. Girolamo Riario who had acquired the State of Imola without the sanction of Lorenzo Medici could not feel secure in its possession so long as the latter lived. The thread of the conspiracy was spun in the Vatican, the plan of the assassination being probably withheld from the Pope, who would naturally refrain from inquiring into matters that could not obtain sacerdotal sanction, while he was ready to absolve his nephew of the consequences of the means he might employ. In this conspiracy, which like the one against Galeazzo ended in a church, Giuliano Medici was murdered and Lorenzo wounded.

The youthful Cardinal Raphael Riario, nephew to Girolamo, and the Pope's legate in Florence, was suspected of the murder. Imprisoned in the palace, he was not set at liberty until June 5. Andrea Bernardi, a contemporary, ascribes the unnatural pallor which ever after distinguished this young prelate as an effect of the fear of death by torture during his imprisonment. The fact remains that the Pazzi were the emissaries chosen by Girolamo Riario. The effects of this conspiracy were the humiliation of its originators, the exaltation of the family it aimed at exterminating, and a two years' war between the Florentines and their allies, on the one hand, and the Pope and the King of Naples, on the other.

Undaunted by this result, and more than ever determined to wrest Florence from the Medici, so that the Pope might bestow it on himself, Girolamo resorted to a curious fiction. By agreement with a priest of Imola, he sent the latter to

Florence, with instructions to affect great hatred of him (Girolamo), and to offer to poison him on condition that Lorenzo should provide the poison. Once in possession of the poison, Girolamo would have produced it before the Pope and the Consistory as a proof that Lorenzo sought his death. For this service the priest had been promised the custody of one of the gates of Imola. But the priest was taken and put to torture on his arrival in Florence, so that Girolamo was again baulked of his hopes.

Later, Riario planned with certain Florentine exiles, who were enemies of the Medici, to remove Lorenzo by any means in their power. The day appointed for his assassination was May 30. It was postponed for repairs to some armour. Meanwhile, on June 1 one of the accomplices was taken, and having named the others all were hanged from the windows of the Bargello.

It is scarcely credible that, in her sixteenth year, Catherine can have had any part in these conspiracies. Perhaps an echo of the terrors and bloody consequences of the great design may have reached her after the birth of Bianca, her eldest child, in 1478, when she was absorbed, not by political cares, but by the first maternal ones.

In 1479, in the midst of the turmoil of the rumours of war, and of the furious excommunication of the Florentines, Sixtus feasted the birth of the eldest son of his favourite nephew, to whom Catherine gave birth September 1. He was christened Octavian, and was held to the font by Rodrigo Borgia, a Spanish cardinal. Yet a few years and this cardinal would occupy the chair of St. Peter and rob Catherine of throne and State.

Meanwhile Duchess Bona, who ruled Lombardy for her little son, Gian Galeazzo, had weakly reposed all her confidence in a certain Antonio Tassino, a Ferrarese of humble origin, but elegant and attractive appearance. To him the Duchess referred all the deliberations of the council and every act and word of Cicco Simonetta, the experienced and trustworthy Secretary of State, who, conscious of having

saved the State for Bona, refused to bend the knee to the new favourite. Tassino, in hatred of and opposition to Simonetta, brought about a reconciliation between Ludovico il Moro, the young Duke's ambitious uncle, and the Duchess. This sudden and unauthorized return of Ludovic and his gracious reception at the Castle of Milan surprised and offended Cicco. Nor was he disarmed by the deference with which Ludovic affected to treat so valued and trustworthy a servant of the House of Sforza. No sooner was he alone with the Duchess than he expressed his strong disapproval of what had happened, concluding with: "Most illustrious Duchess, I shall lose my head and you will lose your State."

Three days later Ludovic coerced the Duchess into granting a decree for the incarceration of Cicco at Pavia. Two letters of Catherine, dated September 18, one to Battista Calco and the other to Duchess Bona, express the writer's satisfaction in the occurrence. She assures her stepmother that: "Next to the consolation of seeing her father resuscitated she could have none greater than knowing all the fire (discord) in Italy was ended by the imprisonment of that villainous Cicco . . . the homicide of our House and of his own flesh . . ."[1] "God be praised! now she could venture on visiting her mother at Milan."[2] A letter of Sixtus IV. of the same date[3] not only expresses his approval but his regret that his advice on this matter had not been acted on sooner. Catherine, who had been informed by letters from Milan, and by her Roman advisers, that Cicco was a traitor, was too young to suspect the deception practised on her. She could neither refuse to write as she was bidden by the Pope nor divine the tragic end of the unfortunate minister, who after torture that drove his wife (a Visconti) to despair and madness, was decapitated at the Castle of Pavia on October 30, 1480.

The omnipotence of Tassino dates from the death of Cicco. The Duchess's favour made him so arrogant that he often kept Ludovic Sforza and other personages waiting in his anteroom while his hair was dressed. But he overreached

[1] Doc. 137. [2] Doc. 138. [3] Doc. 139.

himself when he tried to give his father the command of Porta Giovia, and was exiled from Lombardy, whence he departed with a great quantity of money and pearls. Ludovic took this opportunity of investing the Duke, who was then twelve years old, with the government, requesting the Duchess "to occupy herself henceforward with her devotions." "Bona was so enraged," writes Corio, "that forgetful of her honour and dignity, she determined also to cross the mountains; nor could she be dissuaded from this unwise plan, but regardless of her children's love, abandoned them to the guardianship of Ludovic Sforza."

Ratti, after minute research, affirms the innocence of Bona's relations with Tassino. Her whole life is a protest against this calumny, invented to serve the designs of Ludovic, who seized the unhappy Duchess on her way to take refuge in Piedmont, and confined her for the rest of her life in the fortress of Abbiategrosso, where some historians say she died from poison administered by him in 1494. It would, however, appear from a letter in the archives of Mantua that Bona was alive in France about the year 1500. Meanwhile the fortunes of the Riario grew day by day. The Pope's chief care was to give them a State, and the papal army fought only on their behalf.

The chronicles of Forli narrate how, on the death of Pino degli Ordelaffi on February 11, 1480, the dominion of the city, amid the clash of factions and rumours of intrigue, amours, and poison, was lost by the Ordelaffi, who had reigned over it for a hundred and fifty years, and had been from the earliest times the most valiant and heroic family of Romagna. A quarrel between the two lines of the ancient house of Ordelaffi was a pretext for Sixtus to seize their dominion in the name of the Church, and give it to his favourite nephew. Sinibaldo, the infant heir, was dead of poison; the fortress had surrendered to the representatives of the Pope, who, delighted to have won the game so easily, invested Girolamo Riario, his wife Catherine and their heirs, until the line should be extinguished, with the possession of Forli, from which Antonio and Francesco Maria Ordelaffi were deposed, "for

having used violence, killed and wounded the soldiers of the Church, and attacked the fortress with bombs and cannon." In Count Girolamo, as vicar of the Church, were vested all the civic rights of the city, subject to a yearly tribute of 1000 florins.

The acquisition of Forli, combined with that of Imola, became of political importance. These two cities, sufficiently fortified, might, under given circumstances, conduce to the maintenance of the balance of power between the northern and meridional powers of Italy. For there were only two roads from the States of Milan and Venice to the States of the Church and the kingdom of Naples, and one of these was the Tuscan and the other that of the Romagna, which passed through Imola and Forli. This position, despite its danger, entailed the support of one of the greatest of the powers, so that the first step of Girolamo Riario was to commission Maestro Giorgio Fiorentino to strengthen the fortress of Ravaldino, and add to it a citadel, where the whole Court could take refuge in case of rebellion or invasion. The first stone was laid June 1, 1481. Festivities followed one upon the other, and on the day after the dispatch of the brief of investiture the new Lady of Forli gave birth to a second son.

The citizens of Forli were happy and full of confidence. Since it was written that the city must have a master, that it should have fallen to the lot of the Pope's favourite nephew seemed a guarantee of many advantages in the future. Four orators left for Rome to tender thanks to the pontiff and homage to the new lord, who annulled the odious tax on flour and those hitherto levied on the division of property, dowries and provisions. He summoned to Rome many citizens of Forli, who each, according to their desires and capabilities, were provided with lucrative office. He added that he wished to visit his subjects, but how could he abandon His Holiness in the midst of such terrible anxieties?

The moment was one of great danger. The Pope was on the worst of terms with the Duke of Milan and the King of Naples, who had sent his son Alfonso to invade the States of the Church. News had arrived of the occupation of

Otranto by 15,000 Turks. Where would these barbarous heretics stop? Italy was entirely open to their attacks. There were those who advised the Pope to take refuge in France, while others opined that the expedition against the Turks should proceed from the Holy See, not only in defence of its own States, but of the whole of Christendom. These terrors hung over Italy until May 3, 1481, when the Sultan died, and, as if by enchantment, the Turkish fleet disappeared from the shores of Italy. Then only did Girolamo and Catherine obtain the papal sanction to visit their subjects in Romagna.

# CHAPTER VI

## CATHERINE IN THE ROMAGNA AND VENICE (JULY—AUGUST 1881)

ROMAGNA had been for two centuries the most unhappy of the many disturbed and unhappy provinces of Italy. In the place of their old nominal suzerainty, the popes had succeeded in establishing a real dominion which they had sought to render ever more direct and immediate. This policy, and the action and rebellion it evoked, had been accompanied by intrigue, fraud, treason and bloody wars; the character of the Romagnole population, and especially of the papal Court, had fallen into extreme discredit. The perennial instability of the papacy in which, as in all elective monarchies, everything was subject to change with the person of the prince, increased the evil. The distance moreover which separated the Romagna from Rome, to which it was bound by political and traditional, but not by natural, ties, necessitated a separation of the administrative government from the sovereign rule; each individual pope had made it over for an annual tribute to one of the more influential families in each city, or had even sold it outright. The Ghibelline and Guelph factions and personal and dynastic ambitions brought about civil war, internal broils and fratricide among these papal vicars who were, more or less, the autonomous tyrants of every Romagnole city. The populace was a minor factor, for civic liberty, at first suppressed by individual tyrants and later by the centralizing action of papal rule, had never obtained in Romagna.

After their flight to Avignon, the popes determined at any cost to possess a State in Italy, their craving for temporal,

having increased with their loss of spiritual power. They spent untold treasure in the attempt to reconquer Romagna, to the scandal of Christendom. More than once they flooded this most rebellious of provinces with blood, and abandoned it to the fire and sword of ferocious mercenaries, led by avaricious and inhuman prelates. More often than any other province, Romagna had been laid waste by bands of French, Germans, Gascons and Bretons, whose excesses, instead of subduing her, had aroused the spirit of military honour and jealous love for the glory of Italian arms, which, combined with cupidity and ambition, had given to Italy the first of her great *condottieri*. The Romagna, at the time with which we are concerned, was already the brawling province of forty years later, that has been described by Guicciardini. Corruption and party violence were the rule in all her cities, and this lamentable condition lasted till 1590, when the first century of the new era had nearly come to an end.

The approaching solemn entry of Girolamo and Catherine was announced at Forli and Imola. Such changes, not unfrequent in those unhappy communities, always awakened new hopes and were marked by great festivities. During eight days, long lines of mules, whose burdens bound with silken cords were covered with cloths on which the Serpent of the Visconti, quartered with the rose of the Riario, were broidered in gold and silver, and carts laden with chests and trunks that contained costly household utensils, were seen to enter the town. Then came the long file of members of the household and servants and, at last, Catherine's little children. The Count and Countess did not arrive until eight days later, on July 15. Triumphal arches were erected and tapestries hung in the streets, where the first to receive them were a company of white-clad youths, bearing palm-branches. The Riario descended from their litter, thanked them for the peaceful augury, and continued on their way, the Count on foot, the Countess riding a white palfrey whose trappings were of cloth-of-silver embroidered with pearls. The young nobles in white and gold received them under a stately

canopy, which they had carried for a mile from the town. The clergy were headed by the Bishop Alexander Numai, with whom, after an exchange of compliments, the Riario proceeded to the Porta Cotogni. Here they were received by the magistracy, whose chief presented the keys of the city on a silver shield. The sounds of music, the ringing of bells, the neighing of horses and clamorous cries of the people made it impossible for any one of those present to hear a word of the magniloquent discourse, but it was remarked that the manner in which the *Signori* replied to the magistrate left no room for doubt that they had appreciated every word of it. They continued on their way, accompanied by Giordano and Paolo Orsini, Girolamo Colonna, Gabriello Cesarini, and many other Roman noblemen, and followed by all who had already met them. The ever-increasing crowd was presently parted by a triumphal car full of prettily-adorned children representing the Graces, who declaimed verses, while a genius saluted the new rulers. Riario, who had by this time mounted a powerful bay charger covered entirely with cloth-of-gold, was surrounded by twenty-four guards habited in green silk, with stockings broidered with his "device" and bearing halberds and Castilian blades. Women and maidens pressed close to the horses, holding out their hands to Girolamo and Catherine, who smilingly gave theirs in return. Then followed other amenities, after which the pageant reached the piazza, where an artificial "giraffe, ugly but very cleverly constructed, performed many wonders," says an anonymous chronicler. On arriving at Santa Croce, the Count was carried from his horse by men dressed in white and deposited on the high altar. Priests intoned the *Te Deum*. On approaching the palace, he passed under an arch where three women, who represented Justice, Moderation and Power, raised their voices in song. At the entrance to the palace, Girolamo, turning to the men who were waiting to lift him from his saddle, said: "To your arms I commend myself, save my horse for me and I will do my duty." It was the custom for the populace to take possession of the prince's horse, for whose recovery he paid a ransom.

When Catherine was preparing to dismount, she was suddenly seized by some young men who carried her up the palace staircase. Others fought and even wounded each other in the piazza for the possession of her horse, whose gold harness was broken and divided in a thousand pieces. Catherine ransomed her palfrey by giving in exchange her cloak of cloth-of-silver.

Meanwhile the nobles and their ladies awaited the Count and Countess in the palace, where, after an exchange of courtesies, they took their places on a sort of throne under a canopy and listened to an eulogy delivered in their honour by Dr. Guido Pepi, a scholar learned in the vulgar tongue, in Latin, Greek and Hebrew. The reply of Riario was prompt and happy. Impatient to prove his good-will, he confirmed the exemptions he had granted from Rome, to which he added other immunities, assuring them that in future he would do still more for the public weal.

After the speeches, refreshments were served, and a prodigious quantity of sweetmeats and pastry thrown out of the windows to the populace. At the ball on the same evening, Catherine—then in her twentieth year, wearing her most precious jewels and a turban whence depended a long veil wrought with the device *Diversorum operum*, and a rising sun piercing the clouds in silver and pearls—was more beautiful than ever. Leoni Cobelli, painter, musician, dancing-master and chronicler, was among the musicians; words fail him to describe her grace and the beauty of the whole scene. After the ball, envoys from the various castles of the little State made their obeisance to Girolamo, presenting him with "fowls, calves, wax, sweets, forage, and other household necessaries."[1] On the following day, the moneys coined for this occasion were thrown to the people from the balcony of the palace. There was a tournament in which the Orsini, Colonna, Tolentino and other gentlemen took part, and a wooden castle which had been erected at the Crocetta was taken by assault. This castle, which was an allusion to the burning topic of the day, represented Otranto besieged by the Turks

[1] Marchesi.

in the preceding year. It was painted in red and white, the ancient colours of the town. The tower was adorned by a prodigious rose encircled by a serpent with the motto: *Servabit odorem.*

The Riario immediately began to adorn the interior of the palace. The chronicles describe great cupboards, ten feet high, filled with precious plate and china, that were placed in the great hall. The citizens, courteously admitted to view

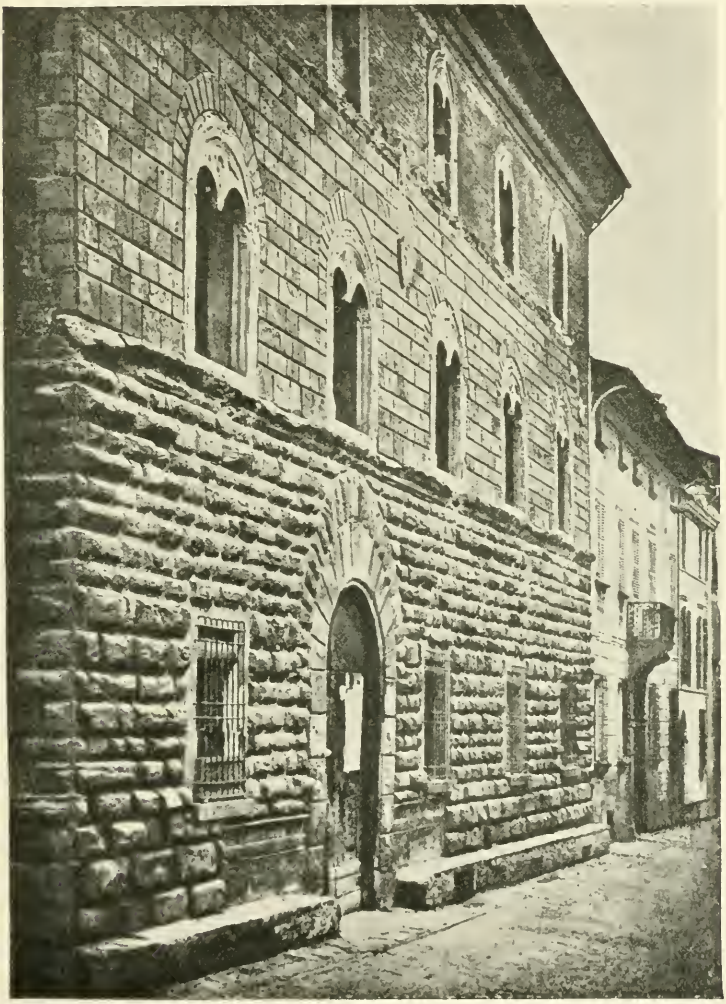



COINS STRUCK BY THE RIARIO.

this unusual magnificence, estimated its value at not less than 100,000 ducats. Catherine often appeared in public, her garments and those of her maids of honour were more splendid every day; she displayed daily a new dress during her stay in Forli. By these and other apparently futile means, the Riario succeeded in convincing the people of Forli that the wealth of the new rulers was boundless; and

that there was no fear of their demanding money—on the contrary, they had come to enrich them.

Despite the warmth of his reception, Girolamo, who felt



PALACE BUILT BY THE RIARIO-SFORZA, 1484.

that the people hated him, shut himself up in his own house. This reserve was looked upon with suspicion. "Since his

arrival, he has hardly ever left his room, so that the men of Forli are beginning to murmur," wrote the Milanese orator.

On August 12, the Riario, with an escort chosen from the inhabitants of Forli, rode to Imola, which had then been in their possession for several years. The Sassatelli and Vaini rode to meet them with so many friends and retainers that they might have been taken for a well-ordered army. The nobles awaited them at the river Santerno and accompanied them under a canopy to the gates, where they were received by the clergy and the magistracy, who presented the keys of the city. Imola had been greatly rebuilt and adorned by Riario, who had spent large sums in pulling down old hovels built of mortar and replacing them by better buildings, in paving the muddy streets, mending the walls, adding towers and bastions to the gates, and completing the fortress which had been built by Catherine's father. In the opinion of Philip of Bergamo, Riario's munificence had converted "the dregs of Romagna into one of its most beautiful cities."

Yet Girolamo was not loved in any part of his dominions, and it was commonly said that he might be obliged to cede Forli to the Venetians. He employed a hundred workmen, with master-builders and carpenters, in the erection of his new palace at Imola, yet the Milanese envoy found the whole country ready to turn against him.

There is ample proof that Girolamo, who was hated as a prince throughout Romagna, was harsh in his relations to his wife, and that Catherine was afraid of him. "Madama sent her chancellor to me," wrote the Milanese envoy (Appiani) from Forli in July 1481, "to inform me that Her Ladyship had tried to obtain permission to go to Milan, but that My Lord the Count, her Consort, had refused it, not without some anger. Therefore if, as she suspected, I had come with the purpose of obtaining this permission for Her Ladyship, she begged me not to ask it; for this would make a breach between herself and her Lord, who would believe that she had been the cause of my coming." . . . . To the urgent appeal of Appiani, the Count had opposed excellent reasons for refusing the invitation. "Then I suggested that he should

send his Illustrious Consort, with her august children. He replied that he could not live without her . . . . The aforesaid Madama Contessa has two children and is five months pregnant. She is beautiful, splendid in her apparel, and well-adorned with jewels." He adds, in conclusion, that he had given a gold ducat "to two drummers in the apartment of the Countess, who play while Her Ladyship is at table." About this time Catherine wrote to the Duchess of Ferrara for some greyhounds, "good runners for hunting the fleet mountain goats in the Roman Campagna, a couple of good setters and a couple of falcons."

On September 2 Girolamo and Catherine left for Venice. The official pretext for the journey was to bring about an alliance between the Signoria and the Pope against the infidels. The Turks still held Otranto, and all over Italy fear prevailed that they might suddenly invade the peninsula. This danger had always been a favourite pretext of the popes for levying soldiers, hiring mercenaries, demanding money and imploring the help of the Powers.

There was no Italian capital where this was believed to be the true, or at least the only reason for the journey. The Turk's name was ever on the Pope's lips, but in his heart was the aggrandizement of the Riario. And besides all the rest, Riario was really sent to Venice to perorate *pro domo sua*.

In the war between the Pope and the Florentines, consequent on the conspiracy of the Pazzi, Duke Hercules of Ferrara, although a vassal of the Church, had been one of the *condottieri* of the Florentine army. He was excommunicated and declared to be deposed. But the rebel had laughed at his deposal and his excommunication, and vowed that by virtue of his sword he would continue to be Duke of Ferrara.

The Venetians were violently opposed to him, especially since his marriage with Eleonora, daughter of King Ferdinand of Naples, their chief enemy, who might avail himself of his son-in-law's fortresses to carry the war into the heart of their possessions on the mainland. Venice, having established her

confines as far as the duchy of Milan, would fain have extended her territory as far as the Florentine State. To do this, it was needful to find a pretext for invading the duchy of Ferrara.

The Pope, who hoped to dispose of the House of Este as he had done with the Ordelaffi, seized this opportunity of allying himself with the Venetians against the Duke of Ferrara and invading the States of this excommunicated rebel; and as these States were in part tributaries of the Church and partly of the Empire, it had been agreed between the Pope and the Venetians that Venice should take the imperial cities, Modena and Reggio, while Ferrara should return to the Church, to be given by the Pope to Girolamo Riario.

It was to confirm this agreement and revive the zeal and friendship of his new allies that the Pope had sent Girolamo and Catherine to Venice. Besides Dr. Ludovico Orsi, who accompanied them in the capacity of assessor, and others, the Riario chose a certain Matteo Menghi, Archdeacon of Forli, who, unknown to them, was a spy of Lorenzo Medici. All along the road, from Ravenna to Chioggia, they were met by Venetian noblemen, and received by forty of the leading citizens on their arrival at Malamecco. At the island of San Clemente, the Doge, Giovanni Mocenigo, accompanied by "115 noble ladies, for attendance on Madonna Contessa," came to meet them on the Bucentaur. Among them shone the youthful daughter-in-law of the Doge "habited all in gold."[1] "They entered the city amid the joyous acclamations of the people, and the Doge, with all his following of gentlemen and ladies, accompanied the Riario to their house. When, on the following morning, the Count visited the Doge, the latter met him at the foot of the palace stair." Another day "he took him to visit the arsenal." "They have made him," writes Menghi to Lorenzo Medici, "a patrician of Venice, and, to show him how their Council was organized, they summoned the Supreme Council in his presence. Certain electors having to be chosen from among them by lot, the Count, to do him greater honour, was chosen by acclamation,

[1] Sanuto, *Cronaca Veneta.*

and when he had designated Messer Bernardo Bembo as Podestà of Ravenna (which had to be confirmed by the Council) it was immediately agreed upon. In fact, if he had been the Emperor, I do not think they could have done him greater honour."

Some of the Venetian festivities on this occasion are described by Giacomo da Volterra, who says that on Sunday, September 9, in the great hall of the Doge's palace, one hundred and thirty-two noble maidens, radiant in gold, gems, and pearls, presented a spectacle as magnificent as it was delightful. The crowd of nobles and citizens was so great that Giacomo avers he had never seen so great a concourse, except in Rome at the time of the jubilee.

The Doge, wearing his mantle of cloth-of-gold, took his seat between Girolamo and Catherine, then the others according to their rank. The dances were rather confused, because of the great multitude. At sunset a banquet was served to the princes, the magistracy, and the people; "wax candles made the night lighter than day . . . and the dress of the women represented a value of 300,000 gold coins (*monete d'oro*)."

But the political triumph of the Riario was far from complete. Girolamo could not but recall the experience of his brother, the splendid cardinal, who had been overwhelmed with honours, but to whom a deaf ear had been turned, or worse. The Venetians flattered, fascinated, and dazzled their guests with feasting and homage, without yielding an inch to them, and sent them away deluded in the principal object of their coming. Menghi, the Archdeacon of Forli, ends his letter to Lorenzo Medici with the assurance that after all he need not feel aggrieved by the honours of which Girolamo had been the recipient: "inasmuch, when all is said and done, this his journey has not produced aught that can be displeasing to Your Magnificence and to our other friends. Therefore I do not regret it, for it has given His Lordship the opportunity of seeing more things displeasing than pleasing to him." According to Burriel, the Venetian *Signori*, considering that the Pope was held to be the weakest prince in

Italy; that his States lay in the midst and were open to the attacks of so many others, and that the re-acquisition of Ferrara would be his ruin and that of his allies, informed Girolamo that their republic would neither sanction nor co-operate in it.

At last the Riario, having tendered the *Signori* their thanks for the reception that had been accorded to them, left Venice discontented and disillusioned, and travelling again by the Comacchio road, to avoid Ferrara, arrived at Ravenna on September 22. Immediately after their departure, news reached Venice that the Duke of Calabria had taken Otranto, and the Pope, unwilling to continue the war against the Turks, although the civil wars among them rendered the moment opportune, had recalled his vessels. He preferred to keep his influence for the internal affairs of Italy; he wanted to give the whole of Romagna to Girolamo. War was declared against the Duke of Ferrara in the following year, but the Pope deserted and excommunicated the Venetians, the alliance was broken and the Riario never obtained possession of Ferrara.

From Ravenna, the Riario, with part of their escort, went to Imola, where fresh trouble was brewing during their absence. Two conspiracies had been suppressed between the time of their investiture in the preceding year and their recent state entry, and had ended in the execution of some of the culprits, and the hanging of their bodies from the palace windows. The Riario had believed these dangers to have been surmounted, and were ingenuously awaiting the expression of their subjects' gratitude for the exemptions granted to them, when they were informed of the existence of a conspiracy among the lower orders to reinstate the Ordelaffi, and to put the Count and Countess to death on their arrival at Forli. "What think you of our subjects at Forli?" queried Girolamo of the governor of that city, Count Gian Francesco Mauruzzi, surnamed Tolentino, whom he had summoned in haste to Imola. "Is this my reward for the immunities I have given them? But for the love of God,

hold thy peace, and tell no one of this thing until after my departure."[1]

Hemmed in by men-at-arms, Girolamo and Catherine rode into Forli, and, on the following day, attended mass at St. Mercurial, surrounded by three hundred armed retainers. There was no feasting nor public rejoicing on this occasion. The *Signori* were rarely seen, and never unless protected by their men-at-arms. On the 14th they left for Rome, impatient to escape from danger, and to leave the governor free to deal with the culprits.

Girolamo took with him some Imolese and many more citizens of Forli, ostensibly to provide them with office in Rome, but in reality as hostages. Catherine went to Imola, where, before joining her husband, she deposited her children and all her valuables. They were met within two miles of Rome by the Milanese orators, who wrote their duke that "His Lordship's Illustrious Consort had journeyed in two baskets, on a mule, because of her advanced pregnancy." At Forli no punishment was inflicted until ten days after the departure of the Riario; on November 15 five bodies were seen to hang from the palace, while some persons were fined or exiled. But soon the Count ordered their return, and assigned the sums accumulated by the fines to the completion of the Dome. Girolamo had risen to power by the help of the nobles, but the Ordelaffi were deeply rooted in the heart and traditions of the people, who were easily induced to conspire on their behalf. And because the Ordelaffi sought to undermine the power of the Riario where it was weakest, the conspiracies of Forli were always hatched among the populace and peasantry.

It was remarked that Catherine, who showed neither fear nor resentment at what had occurred, did not open her lips on the subject. It was surmised that this reserve, unusual in a character untempered by age and experience, was imposed upon her by her husband, who looked upon silence and dissimulation as his only safeguards. But Catherine could find no peace, knowing as she did the part taken by Lorenzo

[1] Cobelli.

Medici in this conspiracy and her husband's part in the cause of his enmity. Nor was she reassured by a letter written by Lorenzo in reply to Girolamo's inquiry, in which the former deprecated recent occurrences without absolutely denying his share in them. Both the Riario had trembled on receiving this letter, but Girolamo, preoccupied with the condition of Rome and the affairs of Italy in general, soon forgot it. Catherine, by reason of that political acumen and strength of purpose with which she was endowed even at the age of nineteen, realized the necessity of initiating a personal policy by which, without ceasing to aid and defend her husband with all her power, she might win for herself and her children the indispensable friendship of Lorenzo. In the event of Girolamo's perishing in the struggle with the untiring vengeance of the astute Florentine, the latter would be bound by the ties of the old friendship which had subsisted between himself and her father, Galeazzo, and her uncle Ludovic; and so compelled to defend and protect the rights of the daughter and niece of his allies, and withheld from wresting the States of Imola and Forli from the children of Girolamo Riario.

## CHAPTER VII

### CATHERINE, THE RIARIO, ORSINI AND COLONNA

On their return to Rome the Riario found the Pontiff aged and irritated. The King of Naples had demanded right of way through the papal States, for the troops he was sending to the Duke of Ferrara to fight the Venetians. The Pope refusing, the King sent the Duke of Calabria to attack the States of the Church. On June 6 Girolamo advanced with the standard of the Church on Grottaferrata, where the Duke was, and halted at San Giovanni in Laterano.

Here he passed the day casting dice on the altars with Virginio Orsini and his captains, or astride on the shrines that held the sacred relics. The faithful turned and fled with horror from the threshold of the Basilica. Such was the respect in which the Pope's nephew, the Defender of the Church, held holy things and places! He gambled away the money confided to him by the Pope and the Venetian Republic, until he had none left wherewith to pay his men, who plundered the houses and stole the grain in the Campagna while the peasants appealed to the Pope, who promised to indemnify them. Meanwhile they ground their corn in the city. But in this they were thwarted by Count Girolamo, who ordered his soldiers to seize and sell it, and retain the proceeds in lieu of pay.

The Pope lost confidence in his nephew, and asked the Venetian Republic to contribute a contingent under Robert Malatesta of Rimini, son of the famous Sigismund, who was in their service. The Venetian senate sent him at once, and Malatesta, with a company of foot, immediately attacked the Duke, on which the latter retreated. While in the Lateran

Girolamo spent his time in drinking, swearing, and losing the money of the faithful, and while his soldiers were maltreating and contaminating the population of Rione Monti, a young and beautiful woman, followed by the loving reverence and the blessings of the people, haunted the churches and sanctuaries of Rome. In the garb of a penitent, she knelt for hours at the tombs of the apostles and gave alms to the poor, while her pallor and emaciation told of nights spent in prison, of fasting, and of penance. This woman was Catherine Sforza, wife of the Captain-general, who awaited the issue of the impending battle with a harrowing anxiety. It transpires from several documents that Catherine knew her husband to be wanting in courage. She trembled lest he should be held up to the contempt and derision of the camp. The instinct which causes every woman to despise a coward and glory in a hero was strongest in Catherine Sforza, and by means of ministrations to the poor and afflicted, nightly vigils and the torments of corporeal penance, Catherine strove to become the creditor of heaven, demanding as her reward the triumph of Girolamo Riario.

On August 21, the Duke of Calabria was at last forced into an encounter in a desolate spot which to this day is known as Campo Morto, where he sustained a crushing defeat. Providence would appear to have taken pity on Catherine, for although her husband did not appear on the field, he succeeded in monopolizing the honours of victory, the news of which was dispatched to the Pope by a mounted courier. That same night Catherine, in the ecstasy of her joy, wrote as follows to the Signory of Sienna—

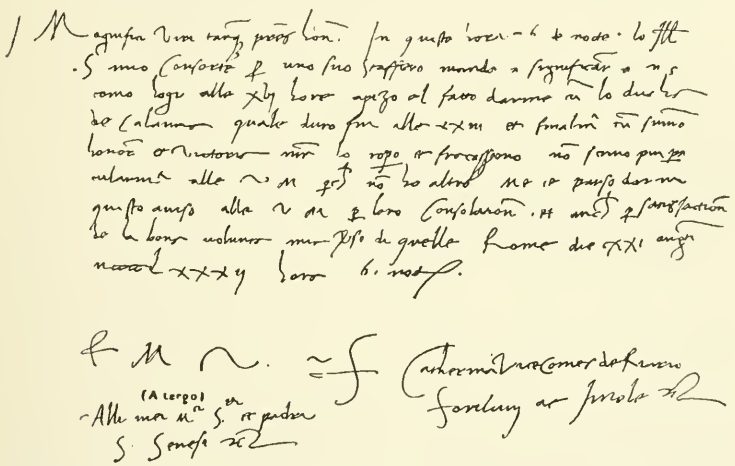
"*Magnifici Viri tanquam patres honorandi.* At this sixth hour of the night, the Illustrious Lord my consort informs His Holiness by one of his equerries that at the sixteenth hour he gave battle to the Duke of Calabria. The battle lasted until the twenty-third hour, when, to our utmost honour and glory, the enemy was annihilated. I write only this to Your Magnificences because I have no other news. I felt it incumbent on me to give Your Magnificences this

information for your consolation and as a proof of my good-will.

"Rome *die XXI. Augusti* MCCCCLXXXIJ, at the sixth hour of the night. E.M.V.

"CATHERINA VICECOMES de Riario Forlivij ac Imole, etc."[1]

But the real hero of the day was Malatesta, who at the head of his infantry had led the assault on the enemy's trenches and had put them to flight, while Girolamo had been seen to retire to the tents in the rear. By thus exposing his colleague's life he had hoped to revenge himself on him



AUTOGRAPH LETTER OF CATHERINE SFORZA TO THE SIGNORY OF SIENNA.

for having favoured a conspiracy to reinstate the Ordelaffi in 1480; he had never ventured to attack Malatesta openly, but in the event of his death had determined to seize Meldola and the whole State of Rimini.

The Pope had won a great victory, but his nephew had been defeated. Malatesta had returned unharmed from the battle and his hopes were at an end. Moreover, the truth leaked out, and the Pope commanded that Malatesta should make a triumphal entry into Rome, with a cardinal to hold his horse's bridle. Then on the 29th Malatesta suddenly fell

[1] Archives of Siena, *Atti del Concistoro.*

ill of dysentery and expired on September 10, in the house of his kinsman, Cardinal Nardini. Thither hastened Sixtus IV. to administer the Sacrament, but to his apparent profound grief he found him already dead, according to popular rumour of poison, at the instigation of Girolamo Riario, and to official report, of fever contracted in the pestilential plains of Campo Morto. After ordering solemn obsequies for the dead hero and a monument in St. Peter's, the Pope dispatched Girolamo Riario to Rimini to seize the heritage of the infant heir of Malatesta, in which he was thwarted by the Florentines, who protected the widow and child of Malatesta.

In Rome Girolamo Riario and his nephew the Cardinal could do anything with impunity; "the Pope has given up the government, both temporal and spiritual, and moneys and everything else to the Count and San Giorgio (Cardinal Raphael), and there are not wanting judges who give sentences according to their pleasure," wrote Lanti, the Siennese Orator to the Signory. Girolamo, who was now feared as much as he was hated, invaded, in conjunction with the Orsini, the possessions of the Colonna, and cast the Cardinals Colonna and Savelli, whose wealth he appropriated, into prison in chains.

One of the most piteous episodes of Girolamo's reign of terror is the capture, torture, and execution of the Protonotary, Lorenzo Colonna. The Pope's mercenaries sacked all the churches in the neighbourhood of the Quirinal, and the whole quarter in which stood the houses of the Colonna. The council of the people sent deputies to make peace between Sixtus and the Colonna, but Count Girolamo, tyrant of the Pope and people, would not consent to it. Dismayed by the excesses of which they knew Girolamo to be capable, the Colonnesi promised the Pope Marino, Rocca di Papa and Ardea, leaving to his mercy the life of the unhappy Protonotary.

But Girolamo put to death the ambassador who carried this message, and replied that he would not be content with a few of the Colonna castles, he would have them all, and he

would take them by force, with cannon and bombs. He insisted on the execution of Lorenzo Colonna, whose trial was relegated by the Pope to a special tribunal. On June 30, 1484, at daybreak, Lorenzo, who had surrendered to Virginio Orsini, was dragged into a courtyard of the Castle of Sant Angelo. He heard his sentence with calmness and resignation, and retracting the confessions that had been torn from him by torture, protested his innocence. After a reverent and resigned salutation of the Pontiff who had condemned him to death, he placed his head on the block, calling three times on the name of Jesus. "At the third time his head was severed from his shoulders."[1]

His body was deposited in Santa Maria Transpontina, whence none of his friends and partisans ventured to remove it, until some priests and monks, sent by the mother of the murdered man, carried it to the church of the Santi Apostoli. The unhappy lady caused the coffin to be opened, and gazing upon the body, crushed by torture to a single wound, held the severed head by the hair so that the people might see it, crying—"This is the head of my son! This the faith of Pope Sixtus, who promised that if we gave up Marino to him, he would have given me back my son!" A week later the unhappy mother died of grief.

The blind obstinacy with which Sixtus insisted on the annihilation of the Colonna had no other motive than to enrich his nephew Girolamo with that of which they were despoiled. "No one has moved in the matter," wrote Lanti to the *Signori* of Sienna on June 30. "The populace boils over a little at first, and then is silent. . . . I know not what will happen next. Marino is in the power of the Pope. The plague is ravaging Rome."

At the Court of Rome, the luxury, which surpassed even that of Milan, so deadened and cloaked everything else that it would have sapped the moral energy of Catherine had this not been sustained by her ambition. In the aspiration, the determination to rise to higher power, Catherine, imbued with

[1] Infessura, R.I.S.P., c. 1173–75.

the idea common to the politicians of her time—which was that a strong will combined with astuteness might vanquish any obstacle in the attainment of a given end—was at one with her husband. Yet she did not abandon herself to the current of folly and crime which subsequently led to the ruin of both Sixtus and Girolamo. Despite the cares of her household, her children, the Court and State, she appears to have found time for much reading, chiefly of historical and devotional books, and without affecting the erudition which had become the fashion among the ladies of her time, to have delighted in the society of the cultured and learned. It may be read between the lines of contemporary history how a feeling of disgust and loathing stirred her strong soul against her husband's baseness, and that sometimes she reproached him for the vileness of his acts: to which Girolamo retorted by such brutal and personal violence that Catherine confided later to a Milanese envoy she "had often envied those who died," because of the treatment she endured at her husband's hands. Either frightened by the corruption of the papal Court, or to show that she had no share in her husband's atrocities, or to escape from his violence, she seized the opportunity of his absence on July 7, 1484, and, accompanied by a strong escort, fled to Frascati.

It cannot have been long before these clouds were dispersed, for soon Catherine was back in Rome under her husband's roof[1] at the Lungara, where, without participating in his crimes, she again co-operated in his ambitious schemes.

[1] Now Palazzo Corsini.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CATHERINE IN THE CASTLE OF ST. ANGELO

MEANWHILE the affairs of Italy assumed a new aspect. The Pope, in his terror of the Venetians, under pretext of preventing them from acquiring Ferrara, declared a "Most Holy" league with the other Italian powers on January 6, 1483, and on May 25 excommunicated the Venetian senate. This act reversed the state of the various parties. The King of Naples was now the Pope's ally, the Duke of Calabria came to Rome to kiss his foot and showed great friendliness to Girolamo Riario, his late conqueror. Towards the end of February, a congress was held at Cremona to decide the plan of war and nominate the captains-general. Among these was Girolamo Riario.

On June 16 Catherine arrived with Count Girolamo at Forli, from Rome. The Count went to Imola to assume the command of the troops encamped in that district, and having placed the fortress on a war footing, went on to Bertinoro for the same purpose, returning to Forli in August, where he was present with his wife during the great earthquake of Santa Chiara. Houses were destroyed and bells tolled lugubriously for a month. Catherine and Girolamo inhabited a tent pitched within the precincts of the fortress. The cloister of St. Francis, which was being built at their expense, being partly destroyed, they restored and enlarged it. Catherine gave the example of public prayer and penance and, to appease the Divine wrath, the Riario made a vow to visit the shrine of St. Clara every year, with the chapter of the dome and the magistracy, on the name-day of that saint, to pray

for her intercession with the Almighty, so that a like calamity might henceforward be averted from the city.

Meanwhile Sixtus wrote to his nephew and niece, informing them that he did not feel safe in Rome in the confusion caused by the war between the Orsini and Colonna, and that he needed soldiers, money and friends. He needed the support of their presence. They therefore returned to Rome at the end of August, a weightier reason having conduced to hasten their departure. Letters from the Ordelaffi to certain monks had been intercepted, revealing a widespread conspiracy to assassinate Girolamo and Catherine, who, alarmed by the discovery of so much treachery, and convinced of the necessity of secrecy, were glad to escape the risk of becoming the victims of the plot or of being hated for retaliating on their assailants. They therefore left for Rome, after enjoining on the governor not to shed more blood than was necessary. Yet when the trial was ended, the bodies of two women (one of whom was a nurse of the Ordelaffi), a man, and all the monks were seen hanging from the windows of the palace throughout November 2, 1483. The year 1484 began with a repulsive spectacle for the people of Forli. The body of one Landi, a man of low condition, whose crime had never been divulged, was exhibited hanging from one of the palace windows. It was rumoured that despite recent warnings, he too had been found guilty of conspiring with the Ordelaffi.

In the course of the year, the Pope's chronic gout became acute. He was embittered by the failure of his policy; for Ludovic Sforza had left the league and gone over to the Venetians, whose alliance he needed in his designs on the throne of Milan. The Pope felt his loss of prestige and that he was no longer master of Rome: many more soldiers and much more money were needful for his security, and more than once he had thought of leaving it. In the midst of these terrible anxieties he learned that despite earlier successes, a disadvantageous peace had been concluded at Bagnolo. This fell as a thunderbolt on the Pope, whose gout flew to the chest. On the evening of August 12 he received the envoys, who read to him the conditions of the treaty. "This," he

exclaimed, "is an ignominious peace! My sons, I can neither give it sanction nor blessing." The envoys, perceiving that the agitated old man was losing strength, and that his speech was becoming inarticulate, replied that they hoped to find His Holiness calmer on a future occasion, meanwhile they prayed him to give his blessing to a peace that could not be revoked. Then the Pope, withdrawing a gouty hand from its enveloping bandage, raised it in a gesture that was interpreted by some as a contemptuous refusal, by others as a blessing on the envoys and the peace. He never spoke again, and expired in the night.

"On the following morning," wrote Infessura, "the body of Pope Sixtus, wrapped in a ragged chasuble, was carried with only twenty torches and but a small following to St. Peter's. His corpse was black and disfigured . . . nor was there any one who blessed his memory, save only a certain monk of St. Francis, who watched alone by the body and endured its fearful exhalations."

Like many another, who, abandoned and deceived by the world in his declining years, concentrates his affection on a few, Pope Sixtus, disillusioned and tired with every one, centred in the Riario his whole life and ambition. It was natural that he should take pleasure in the society of Catherine, who day by day developed fresh beauties of mind and person. So marked an admiration for the fair Milanese seemed unbecoming to the age and dignity of the old Franciscan pope, and was the cause of wonder, and perhaps some scandal. But the Pope, to whom this was indifferent, put less restraint as time wore on in the cordiality of his relations to his niece, or rather his daughter-in-law. A picture by a young Roman painter represented the siege of Cavi by the papal forces, with Count Girolamo, as chief of the expedition, in the foreground. The Pope, who wished to see this faithful presentment of the siege, discovered therein the figures of a Franciscan and a woman. In the Franciscan he recognized himself, in the woman he divined an allusion to Catherine. Both the allusion and the satire were terrible. The artist was thrown into prison, beaten and tortured, and his house sacked.

He was condemned to be hanged, and only escaped with his life on being declared insane. Twenty days later the Pope was no more.

This incident proves that Catherine's reputation was unjustly contaminated by her relations with the Pope, although they were imposed upon her by duty and necessity. None



CASTLE OF ST. ANGELO IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY, AFTER THE PICTURE BY CARPACCIO.

could be reputed innocent who stood near to the shameless old man.

News of the Pope's death reached the Captain-general at Paliano, where he was encamped with the Orsini, and Catherine, who with her three children shared with her husband the rigours of camp life. Girolamo was at the same time

ordered by the Sacred College to return to Rome with the troops and to station himself on the other side of Ponte Molle. Each chose the most congenial part; Girolamo obeyed the mandate of the Sacred College, and, accompanied by Virginio Orsini, brought his troops to Ponte Molle on the evening of the 14th, while Catherine, accompanied by Paolo Orsini, resolutely pursued her way and entered the Fort of St.



CASTLE OF ST. ANGELO BEFORE THE DEMOLITIONS OF 1892.

Angelo. The Romans, who had never been permitted by Catherine to forget that she was a Sforza, revered in her the personification of the power and influence of the duchy of Milan. They crowded the narrow streets in expectation of the coming conclave, crying, "*Duca! Duca! Viva il Duca!*" on her passage. On her arrival at the castle, some doubted her right to enter, others were of opinion that they must await

the orders of the Sacred College, but everything yielded to the imperious presence of Catherine, who, entering as the barred gates were opened, declared that she would hold the fortress for Count Girolamo, and ordered the entrance of the staircase which connected it with the Vatican to be strongly barricaded. The garrison trembled at a sign from her! Soon the cardinals, knowing her within, must tremble.

Innocenzo Cordrochi of Imola was vice-governor of the fortress. Catherine suspected him and sent him away, with other Imolese. Cardinal Riario sent an envoy to inform the Countess that he wished to see her, but Catherine, who had at that moment little confidence in cardinals, even when they were near relations, replied that he could not enter the Castle of St. Angelo at his pleasure, but that if he came with an escort, she would receive him in the presence of a witness. She was told that the envoy raged and stormed. "Ah!" she exclaimed, "this man would match his wits with mine! Does he not know that I have the brain of Duke Galeazzo, and am as headstrong as he?"

These are the first indications of that militant and wilful humour, that, displayed in supreme moments, was later to make Catherine so famous throughout Italy. And it is in the Castle of St. Angelo that she first appears to us as she is described by Cerretani: "Wise, brave, great, with a full, beautiful face; speaking little. She wore a tan satin gown with two ells of train, a large black velvet hat in the French mode, a man's belt whence hung a bag of gold ducats and a curved sword; and among the soldiers, both horse and foot, she was much feared, for that armed lady was fierce and cruel."

Meanwhile, Rome was a prey to extreme disorder. The anarchy that always followed upon the death of a pope was a festival for the populace, for murderers, thieves, and assassins of every degree, while quiet, decent people bent before the storm, and those in high places either sallied forth to attack their rivals or entrenched themselves within their towers to resist them. Rome rang with the cries of victims, uncounted and uncared for. But the worst was reserved for the favour-

ites and nephews of the late Pope, so that popular fury first vented itself on the house of the Riario on the Lungara[1] close to what is still known as the Vicolo de Riario. This palace or villa had been furnished by Catherine with great magnificence, according to the fashion of her time, in which the most important article of furniture was a *credenza* or high cupboard that contained vases, glass, majolica and silver reserved for the use and adornment of banquets. In the house of the princes and nobles there were many chests and cupboards, the largest of which stood in the entrance hall and contained the household linen. Along the walls stood heavy tables and wooden chairs, generally covered with leather with clamps of bright metal; if without leather, the wood was covered with movable cushions; the great wide beds were surmounted by a canopy. The flooring was of cold, bare tiles; in princely houses the woodwork was carved, gilt and painted with the arms of the family. In the houses of private persons, even of the rich, the walls were simply whitewashed; in the palaces of great personages they were covered, on solemn occasions, with figured tapestry. A reliquary and the image of a saint, especially of the Madonna, before which a lamp was ever burning, completed the internal decoration of a fifteenth-century house.

The riotous populace, possibly led by an enemy of the Riario, sacked and ruined the contents of their house, even to the wooden galleries where carved arms of the Sforza and the Riario were emblazoned and painted. Windows were broken, doors torn from their hinges, even the stables were so completely ruined that no horses could stand in them. In the garden the trees were cut down, and fire would have been set to everything, to the cries of "Colonna! Colonna!" if the conservators and other officials had not arrived on the spot.

Yet, after all, the enraged populace did not succeed in destroying every trace of the Riario, for two hundred and fifty-four years later, when the nephews of Pope Clement XII. rebuilt the palace in its present form, they discovered human bones in the subterranean passages.

[1] Now Palazzo Corsini.

# CHAPTER IX

## CATHERINE LEAVES ROME. THE NEW POPE

In a letter of Guidantonio Vespucci to Lorenzo Medici, dated August 18, the Florentine Orator writes that he had visited Girolamo Riario, who had told him that on "no account" would he tolerate the election of Cardinals San Marco, Savelli, nor Molfetta (Cibo who, after all, was elected under the name of Innocent VIII.) to the papacy. "He should keep on his guard, for if it happened that one of these were elected, he would have recourse to arms, and give a turn that suited him to the affair." The Florentine Orator adds that he had tendered the offices of Lorenzo to Girolamo, in the protection of the latter's State in such wise "as to bring tears to the eyes of the Count."[1]

It is difficult to believe in the sincerity either of Lorenzo's offer or of Girolamo's gratitude. They had been deadly enemies for years. The means employed by Catherine, who had appealed to Milan, were, as usual, more efficacious. "I know from a good source," wrote the Siennese Orator, "that the State of Milan is protecting the States of the Count, and has furnished him with soldiers for his safety. Whether or no it has intervened in the affairs of Rome, I do not understand. Every one's procedure is underhanded and silent. If treason, dissimulation and treachery were lost arts, they might be re-discovered here in these days." "God grant us a good change!" wrote Lanti in another letter on the preliminary intrigues of the election; "we cannot do worse than heretofore."

The obsequies of Pope Sixtus, on the 17th, had been

[1] *Archivio Mediceo avanti il Principato Filza*, 39.

attended by only eleven cardinals. The Cardinals Cibo, Savelli, Della Rovere (related to Girolamo), and Ascanio Sforza (related to Catherine) had refused to attend them, rather than pass under the Fortress of St. Angelo while Catherine held it. They said that unless the Sacred College found means to seize the castle from that woman, and to deprive the partisans of the Orsini from the guardianship of the Vatican, they should refuse to attend the conclave. Then began the treaties to obtain a short truce and the opening of the conclave. The Orsini promised to retire to Viterbo for a month, the Colonna to Lazio, while to induce Girolamo to give up St. Angelo, and retire to his States, the Sacred College promised him 8000 ducats, with a continuation of all the stipends granted him by the late Pope, and the title of Captain-general of the Church, and also that the new Pope should confirm him in the possession of Imola and Forli, and pay him an indemnity for the destruction of his house.

The cardinals, on the security of the silver and other property of Sixtus, contributed a loan of 7000 ducats, which was handed to Girolamo for the pay of his men-at-arms on the 22nd. Girolamo, accompanied by two prelates, was to leave on the 24th. "The monies were paid on Monday," wrote Lanti; "the Countess is still in the castle." How could they get her out of it? The Count had, as usual, yielded to threats and money, but there was no means of corrupting nor frightening her, whose evident intention was to hold the castle until the election of the new Pope, and then only yield to him when her claims had been satisfied. According to the agreement with Girolamo, the castle should have been surrendered on the morning of the 24th, but the sun went down and she had not moved. "The Countess is reported to be ill," wrote Lanti, "and therefore her departure has been postponed." Her advanced pregnancy lent probability to this rumour, but in any case the indisposition was very opportune, and if she were ill Catherine cannot be said to have been inactive. In the night, between August 24 and 25, Catherine, having previously revictualled the castle, secretly admitted a hundred and fifty of her husband's soldiers, whom

she and the garrison received with great demonstrations of joy. But this time she had gone too far. The Sacred College, suddenly acquiring a courage born of fear, affected a clamorous indignation at the violation of the contract, and threatened to repudiate its obligations with regard to the Count's revenue and safe-conduct unless the castle were immediately surrendered. When Catherine saw the game was lost, that she was betrayed by her husband, who had taken the money, and was herself, perhaps, really suffering from her condition and the pestilential air of Rome at that hot season, she was obliged to yield. On the evening of the 25th, eight cardinals presented themselves at the castle in the name of the Sacred College; the Countess, hearing that among them was her uncle, Ascanio Sforza, ordered them to be admitted.

The cardinals courteously assured Catherine of their protection of herself and family, but determined to rid themselves, once and for all, of so dangerous a woman, were unanimous in insisting on her immediate departure. Lanti, the Siennese Orator, rode to the castle and witnessed the departure of Catherine, who, mounted on her palfrey, surrounded by the pikes and halberds of her men-at-arms, and followed by her household, looked pale and weary. Her husband, in allowing himself to be bought, had prevented her from holding the Castle of St. Angelo to the last, but fortune held in store for her another opportunity of showing the world how to defend a fortress, and how not to leave it by any other way than a breach in its walls.

Before leaving Rome, Count Girolamo made a clear statement of his accounts to the Apostolic Chamber, with a result that left enormous sums to the credit of the Captain-general of the Church. This wise and provident step proved, after his death, of great service to Catherine and his children.

On the road to Forli, news reached the Riario of the election of Cardinal Cibo (Molfetta) to the papacy, under the name of Innocent VIII. The news was unwelcome, for Cibo had been an opponent of Riario, who was well aware that no new pope had any tenderness for the nephews of his prede-

cessor; and the chief author of this election had been his cousin Giuliano Rovere. The characteristics of this handsome pope—amiable, gentle to irresolution, dissolute in his private, and not blameless in his political life—are indicated by Vespucci in his letter of the 29th to Lorenzo Medici. "When he was a cardinal his nature was humane and benevolent. He has not much statecraft, nor literature, yet is not wholly ignorant. He has always been devoted to S. Pier in Vincula (Giuliano Rovere). He is very tall, and full in the face, about fifty-five years old, has one brother, at least one bastard son, and several daughters married here. When he was cardinal, he did not agree with the Count. S. Pier in Vincula[1] may now be looked upon as Pope, and he will maintain his influence better than under Sixtus."

The Riario entered Forli on September 4. On the 7th they received the much-coveted papal sanction of the investiture of Imola, Forli, and their other fiefs, the confirmation of Girolamo's title of Captain-general of the Church, and thirdly, the permission, despite this office, to live in the Romagna instead of Rome, which last ironical concession seemed almost to annul the first. All had been the work of their cousin Giuliano Rovere, who led the inexpert and volatile Innocent according to his will. Though with minds ill at ease, the Riario affected the utmost satisfaction, which they celebrated in Forli and Imola by bell-ringing, fireworks and other public rejoicing for three days.

There were, indeed, in Rome and Florence, those who had been long awaiting the election of a new pope to suppress the malefactor who, under the cloak of Sixtus, had, with impunity, committed so many atrocious crimes, who had been the tyrant of Rome, had originated the Conspiracy of the Pazzi and persecuted the Colonna and Savelli. It had even been determined to whom the States of Imola and Forli should be given after the removal of Girolamo Riario. Lorenzo Medici, secure in the unbounded confidence of the new Pope, most of all fanned this flame. "Lorenzo shall learn," said Innocent VIII. to Pandolfini, the Florentine legate, "that

[1] Cardinal della Rovere, later Pope Julius II.

never was a pontiff who loved him and his house as I do. And having learnt, by experience, the extent of his faith, integrity and prudence, I shall be governed by his memory and opinion."[1]

And Lorenzo, who remembered how narrowly he had escaped the daggers of Girolamo's emissaries, was terrible in counsel. There were besides Cardinal Savelli, whom Girolamo had offended, and whose election to the papacy he had therefore opposed, and the Manfredi, lords of Faenza, who knew that the Riario coveted their State, and who hated them accordingly. All these intrigues to remove Riario by giving full scope to individual revenge, were conducted by the Pope with great prudence and mystery, for he was fearful lest Catherine should bring down upon himself and Lorenzo the reprisals of the Duke of Milan.

The Riario had returned to their dominions, hampered with the occult and insidious enmity of Innocent VIII. and Lorenzo Medici.

Encompassed by so many dangers, the Riario realized the necessity of striking deeper root in their Romagnole provinces, by conciliating the affection of the people.

There had been a bad harvest, and corn was dear. The Count imported it by sea, and on learning that his ships had been wrecked sent for others, whereby he was able to sell it at four lire per measure, while the landowners of Forli sold theirs at seven. The league had ravaged the territory they occupied ; the most able-bodied labourers had been recruited, and the peasantry were in desperate case. The Count remitted the meat tax for the whole of the following year. On October 30, in the midst of the rejoicing for these remissions, Catherine gave birth to a son, who, in honour of Forli, was christened Giovanni Livio.[2] The Fortress of Ravaldino was completed, and close to it arose a princely palace for the Riario and their Court ; barracks for the accommodation of 2000 men were built, store-houses for provisions and ammunition, and the fortress was surrounded by a moat so

[1] Letter of Pandolfini to Lorenzo Medici, Sept. 4, 1484. [2] He died in 1496.

deep and wide as to render it impregnable. The churches, began both at Forli and Imola, were completed, and the convents enlarged; nothing was denied to monks and nuns. Thus Riario strove to win the favour of the people, save himself from his enemies and win God's pardon for the sacrilegious spoliation of Rome.

Instead of this, the effects of the designs of his enemies became apparent. The Zampeschi—whose castles of San Mauro, Giovedio, and Talamello had been seized by Sixtus in favour of Girolamo—encouraged by Lorenzo, the new Pope and others, attacked and took San Mauro, slaying the governor, and also recaptured Giovedio and Talamello.

Girolamo was for dispatching Tolentino to recapture the castles immediately, but Catherine said: "Hector Zampeschi is in the pay of the Church; herein I see the finger of the Pope; no Roman tribunal will decide in our favour. Besides, the Zampeschi, in the execution of their design, must needs have passed through Florence, therefore with the sanction or knowledge of Lorenzo Medici. Let us not move in the dark, but rather fortify ourselves at home. In that we can never be mistaken." According to Catherine's advice the fortress was provisioned and ammunitioned as for a siege; the city was surrounded by troops, and the palace so filled with them that it was proof against any attack.

The advice was good, for they were tired of waiting in Rome, and had decided to kill the Count before the fortress could be ready for his habitation, or, should he enter it, the Pope had promised the funds for a siege. But the rumour of these armaments discouraged them from an attempt that might fail. Enemies of Riario at Forli warned Lorenzo Medici and Savelli that it would be useless, for the Riario were hemmed in by soldiers. Lorenzo, far from desisting, then encouraged Taddeo Manfredi to seize Imola. The latter, with a few men-at-arms, crossed the States of Lorenzo, and arriving at Faenza, planned the assassination of the Vice-Governor of Imola, who discovered the plot in time to catch the spies and scouts of Taddeo, who then took to flight.

Of the thirteen spies, who were all Imolese, two were exposed hung by the neck, one by the feet, and two were tied

to a horse's tail and dragged round the city. The Riario were consoled by the knowledge that all the conspirators had been of the humblest class, unaided by any of the nobles. A year later, on December 18, 1485, a year of apparent peace and festivity, but of real and insidious danger, Catherine gave birth to another child, who was christened with stately ceremonial at St. Mercurial on January 18, 1486, by the name of Galeazzo. The presence of the representative of Lorenzo Medici among those of the other Italian princes, which created some surprise, was a result of that personal policy initiated by Catherine without detriment to her co-operation with that of her husband, against the consequences of whose excesses guards and coats-of-mail might not always prevail. Were he to succumb in the struggle with Lorenzo, Catherine, who had constrained the latter to an exchange of courtesies, chose that in a possible future Lorenzo should rather regard herself as the sister of his ally than as the widow of Girolamo. Lorenzo might well have combined with his hatred of Girolamo a sentiment of affection and admiration for the fair and sagacious lady of Forli, and sent a representative to the christening of her son.

Catherine had, meanwhile, perceived that the policy of the Pope and the Florentine was not solely dictated by vengeance. The downfall of Girolamo Riario would spring from the principle to which he owed his fortune. Among the sons whom Pope Innocent did not trouble to represent as nephews was the evil, stunted Franceschetto, to whom the Pope destined those States which Sixtus had not been able to bestow on Girolamo. In furtherance of this design, the nuptials of Franceschetto with Maddalena, daughter of Lorenzo Medici, were celebrated in the Vatican on January 20, 1488. This connection rendered indissoluble the alliance between Riario's worst enemies; the daggers for his heart were sharpened, but how to drive them home? He lived in an impregnable fortress, or travelled surrounded by armed men. Every attempt at sedition had miscarried, and every intrigue patiently prepared in Florence and Rome. Patience to his enemies! Led by an unlucky star, he himself would pave the way for their vengeance.

# CHAPTER X

## THE TAXES OF FORLI

SPLENDOUR and careless gaiety continued to prevail at the Court of Forli. But Count Girolamo, although he had achieved his ideal, which was to be regarded as a generous, magnificent and renowned prince, became every day more grim and silent. Priests, monks and nuns saw their churches rebuilt, and their convents enlarged. The pay of the soldiers was (by an exception rare among the little principalities of the time) not only paid punctually, but increased; the prelates and great warriors, who had been received with almost regal hospitality, had divulged that few of the Courts of Italy could vie with the splendour of the Riario. But despite the smiles of fortune, Girolamo became more grim from day to day. The fact was, that he was short of money, and did not know where to turn for the expenses attendant on his dignity. He no longer held the keys of the treasure of the Church, and all the money that he had brought from Rome was gone.

Catherine, the secret spring of counsel to her husband, is credited with causing a renewal of the old taxes, and thereby causing a bloody catastrophe. Cobelli relates how the people of Forli—with the exception of certain citizens accustomed to live on public stipends—had triumphed in their immunities, of which one effect had been to abolish public offices, with the exception of the charge of castellane or governor, to which the Count appointed his relations, personal friends, and servants. There were a few others in the guards and the customs on merchandise and those payable by foreigners. Some clamoured for office, and others for arrears of pay. "What is to be done?" said the Count. "I have no revenue from

Forli." And they had gone back dissatisfied and menacing, leaving the Count agitated and confused. At this stage the narrative of Cobelli assumes the form of dialogue, gaining in verisimilitude by his frequent quotation of names.[1] Nicolò Panzechi proposed the re-establishment of those taxes that had been abolished at the suggestion of Sixtus. "And what of my vow?" queried Girolamo. "What will be said of me, who am cavalier and count?" "Leave it to me," replied Panzechi. "It will suffice to put the matter before the council." In the evening Panzechi returned, and the Count ended by accepting his advice. Yet in the morning he summoned the chief magistrate, Dr. Andrea Chelini, and explained the difficulties of his position. Chelini dissuaded him, with some warmth, from tampering with the liberties of the people. As for himself, he would never give his bean[2] against their interests. The Count turned his back on him, Chelini went away ill and soon after died, it was thought, although none dared to say it, from the poison of Girolamo. Then, perhaps goaded to it by his daring wife, the Count disclosed his intention to his favourite, Ludovic Orsi.

"Abstain," cried Ludovic, "for the love of God! Why did you swear (to these remissions)? The people are poor and, I fear me, capable of some rash act!" The Count turned away from him, and again summoned Panzechi, to whom he confided the obstinate opposition of Orsi.

"Oh, you are afraid!" replied Panzechi. "You are afraid of these people of Forli—the vilest rabble of Romagna! The Lord Pino (Ordelaffi) would not have been foiled by them. They are as cowardly as cur-pups."

"We have honour, and could not endure blame."

"Summon the council and leave the rest to me," replied Panzechi.

"Of whom are you afraid?" said Catherine.[3] "Are the people of Forli to be the only ones in the world who do not pay taxes? Shall we govern and defend them and, alone

[1] Cobelli, p. 285.

[2] The vote of the council was cast with white and black beans.

[3] Bernardi, baste 448.

among princes, give our own substance to our subjects, who give us nothing? Who can reproach you with your vow, if they for whose good you made it absolve you of it? The poor citizens clamour for office, because they are in want; the officers claim their arrears of pay, and you have nothing to give them. Is every one to die of hunger because of your vow?" And Catherine was to her husband as a sword that drove him to hasten his decision.

The council met on December 27. "Now I," writes Cobelli, who on that day enjoyed the privileges that now belong to representatives of the Press, "desiring to hear and record the truth, entered, in spite of great difficulty, which was only permitted to me by the ministers of him (the Count), who, knowing that I wrote chronicles, were content, and so I entered and heard everything."

On entering the hall, he saw the Count seated in the midst of the doctors and knights who formed the Magistracy of the Ancients (Upper House), in all forty councillors. Nicolò Panzechi spoke first, in the name of the Count, described his position, and recalled the tribulations of the people under Pino Ordelaffi, "who ate our hearts and tore our entrails from our bodies; and persecuted us like dogs." "But now," he continued, "we have here our lord the Count Girolamo, who is an angel sent by God: a benign and clement lord, and a lamb without flaw. From him we have had many exemptions, and, but that the revenue of Forli is insufficient for his office and the State, he would fain confirm us in them. It has never sufficed; that which he has, he brought with him from Rome, and he will not spend it in our stead. Yet must he live as our lord. Therefore, let us restore the ancient taxes to the Count, here present." At these words Girolamo rose to his feet and said with other things that "if the prince owed help to his subjects, justice willed that the subjects should help the prince in his need," concluding by reminding them that when they "had no better entertainment his house had at all hours been free and open to welcome them, nor had his purse been ever closed in avarice." More generous than provident, he was

now reduced to the absolute necessity of providing a remedy for his embarrassment, and after much thought could find none better, howsoever painful to him, than the modification, in times that had so sadly changed, of those concessions made in a time of opulence and boundless prosperity.

He said: and sadly turned to leave the hall. But his words, none of which had been lost, had seemed so sincere, and his bearing so dignified, that a sense of compassion permeated the council, so that when he would have left, the councillors, with gentle violence, detained him. Others spoke who queried: "Why should they deny to the Riario that which had always been given to the Calboli, Orgogliosi and Ordelaffi? If the council renounced its privileges, the Count could no longer be bound by his vow." "Then," continues Cobelli, "Ser Nicolò Panzechi did cry *Hor su!* Gentlemen, say yes or no: who wills that it shall be, and who wills it not. *Hor su, olà.*" The council appeared to be stupefied and all those present: and Ser Nicolò again asked, saying "*Su!* with one accord. To your feet!" Then all rose to their feet, and somewhat unwillingly made their renunciation in favour of the Count. Panzechi at once requested the notary, who stood by his side, to obtain the signatures of the assembly, after each member had been sworn. "Oh, reader, for certain, many did sign with tears and sighs. God alone knows how willingly they renounced!" adds Cobelli. The Count then thanked each orator respectively, and having thanked the council collectively, left the hall.

On January 1, 1486, the tribute became due. The eldest son of Nicolò Panzechi was appointed notary to the commune, the younger writer to the customs, and later head factor. And every man who went to the toll said: "Accursed be thy soul, oh Nicolò Panzechi!" And they who carried the wood cried, when they entered the gate, "Oh, Ser Nicolò Panzechi, may your end be evil!" "Oh, Ser Nicolò Panzechi," said others, "you have three offices this year, and the enmity of all these people!" And all wondered at his impudence. At first the general hatred vented itself on Panzechi, without reaching the Count and Catherine, on whom, indeed, the

benefits of the revenue from the taxes had not yet rained like manna from heaven. A way was yet to be found to levy them with certainty and the least possible vexation. At last the taxes were farmed out for a year, during which the factors would have nothing to pay ; but at the end of the year they were bound to deposit the whole sum in the Count's treasury. These transactions neither entailed danger nor mystery, for an innate sense of justice and gratitude led the citizens to pity and excuse the difficulties of the Riario, who could not be said to have fattened on their subjects, or to have given cause for complaint to any class among them.

The first difficulty came from the peasants, once more subjected to the tax known as *balia.* As in other parts of Romagna, the county of Forli was divided into *ville :* each *villa* being taxed according to its size and produce by persons who rode from *villa* to *villa,* and were appointed by the peasantry to levy their tithes, and pay them into the treasury. As it would have been difficult to collect the taxes in years of dearth, the peasantry had created a deposit that sufficed for the dues of the treasury, without subjecting themselves to any annoyance. The prince in return pledged himself to protect the land and all the harvests. This protection and surveillance were carried out by a corps of mounted yeomen, who went about from one place to another obliging those who caused any damage to indemnify the losers. In doubtful cases, they laid the matter before the *balia* (a sort of tribunal composed of a few nobles), whose judgments were enforced by a commissioner.

When the peasants heard that the Riario were impoverished and about to impose the old tribute on them, they, fearing that it would be worse for them than before, and that they would suffer more than the citizens, began to murmur and threaten. The Count wished to pacify them, and at last it was settled that they should be exempt from the tax and the expense attendant on the charges of the county, of which they would henceforward be themselves in charge on payment to him of 1200 lire. This freed the Count from the obligation of maintaining the yeomanry, and the auditor and the *balia*

from a number of appeals and intricate and wearisome lawsuits. On the other hand the peasants preferred to defend themselves, rather than be defended by venal swashbucklers, who had fallen upon them when and how they pleased, eaten and drunk their substance, and in return for tyranny had exacted bribes and presents.

It was Good Friday, and the Count looked down into the square from a window of the palace; with him was a citizen, who, pointing with his finger, said:

"Do you see that man who is carrying a lamb on his shoulders? He is Antonio Butrighelli of Forlimpopoli, and your enemy, a bad and dangerous man—seize him at once."

Butrighelli was taken, and on him was found a letter from Antonio Ordelaffi to his partisans. He confessed that on that day Ordelaffi was to have entered Forli with six hundred men, kill the guard at the Gate of San Pietro and the Riario, and take possession of the city. Butrighelli was hanged at the Gate of St. Peter on the 3rd, but none of the accomplices he had named, or those to whom the letter was addressed, were molested.

In September 1486, Alfonso of Aragon, Duke of Calabria, arrived at Forli, with the flower of the Neapolitan army, in pursuit of Robert Sanseverino, who had been sent by the Venetians to fight for the Pope. In the peace which had been concluded between the King of Naples and the Pope, on August 15, the former had pledged himself not to attack Sanseverino within the papal States. The Duke was therefore waiting to throw himself upon him as soon as he passed the border; but Sanseverino crossed the Ronco, and retired on Ravenna. The Duke had followed him as far as Imola, returning, after three days, to Forli. His arrival enlivened the people, and the Riario, courteously inclined to the loser of the glorious day of Campo Morto, pressed their hospitality upon him. But he had fallen upon evil times; plague and famine, despite the succour of Catherine, had left sad traces behind them, and the Count, whose pecuniary embarrassments had been common talk, was ill in bed. The Duke thanked them;



BIANCA MARIA SFORZA.
*From the painting by Leonardo da Vinci.*

he preferred to put up at a hostelry close to the Bologna Gate, with his suite, but chivalry impelled him to accept the invitation of the Countess to supper on the 13th. He was accompanied by Virginio Orsini, Giangiacomo Trivulzio, Antonio della Mirandola and the Florentine commissioner. The Count left his bed to receive his illustrious guests. A frugal supper, without music or decoration, awaited them in the Hall of the Nymphs (so called from the paintings on its walls). It would seem as if the Riario, who with lavish magnificence had catered for popularity, had become almost ostentatiously penurious to excuse the recent taxation. No invitations had been issued, for the Duke, desirous of avoiding trouble to his hosts, had informed them that he would take his leave soon after supper, so that he might depart at dawn, with the troops.

Catherine loved to recall the modest feast that had been graced by such distinguished guests, and the pleasure she had in receiving the great warrior who had suffered defeat on the day when her husband usurped the name of conqueror. Nor could the Duke and his companions forget Catherine, whose interest in military matters bore witness to her enjoyment of their society. She was simply dressed and wore no jewels, but to those present appeared more beautiful than ever.[1] On returning to his hostelry, the Duke was surrounded by a friendly multitude bearing so many torches, that with the many illuminated windows, they made "night brighter than day."

In the following November the Milanese Orator, Francesco Visconti, brought Catherine an invitation to the marriage of her sister, Bianca Maria, who was then betrothed to the son of the King of Hungary, but who eventually married Maximilian, Emperor of Germany. Riario was penniless, and he and his wife shed tears in the presence of the Orator. Visconti writes further, that the Countess had gone secretly to his room,[2] and there said to him: "You cannot imagine

[1] She had refused to appear at the Court of Milan without her jewels, which were in pawn.

[2] State Archives of Milan (Foreign Powers).

the life I lead with my husband. It has often caused me to envy those who die."

In January 1487, the nuptials of Hannibal Bentivoglio with a daughter of the Duke of Ferrara were celebrated. The Riario, lords of a neighbouring State, could not absent themselves from a ceremony at which the importance of the respective powers was gauged by the strength of their men and horses, the number and sumptuousness of the suite. They were represented by a commissioner, with seventy horses and eighty "mouths." No other State, except those of Milan and Florence, sent so many. The Riario relied on the taxes for this unexpected and extraordinary expenditure. But there were serious disturbances at Forli, where some honest folk paid their dues without murmuring, while others not only refused to pay, but spread calumny and disaffection among the populace. Girolamo alternately feared the evil that might accrue from indulgence and impunity, and the bitterness that would be caused by repression. As usual, he fled from the centre of sedition, leaving the governor to administer justice, and bear the brunt of reprisals. Before the tumult had caused any bloodshed, Girolamo left for Imola with Catherine. Domenico Ricci, his brother-in-law, was sent to Forli, where his prudence and honesty enabled him to levy the taxes, and to obtain a sort of truce. Riario, when he found he could no longer maintain his favourite character of a liberal and splendid prince, out-stepped the bounds of decency. He raised the tax on flour from six to ten *quattrini* per hundredweight, at Imola, and, what was worse, he mulcted each citizen of twenty *bolognini* for the maintenance of four hundred horse, whereas he only kept a hundred, so that the Imolese were fain to perceive that by means of this deception their lord extorted from them about 1000 ducats. He coveted some mills that belonged to one Astorgio Bonmercati, forced him to sell them to him for a nominal price, and committed other acts of violence by means of decrees, threats, confiscations and condemnations; so that many lips formulated the words *tyrant* and *death:* words that are apt to follow each other in formidable succession.

# CHAPTER XI

## CATHERINE AND INNOCENZO CODRONCHI

Lorenzo dei Medici exulted in the ever-increasing dangers that encompassed Girolamo : at last he was certain of the ruin of the Riario ; the course of events did but second his vengeful design. Catherine convinced herself that, despite the amicable nature of their relations, she could no longer hope that Lorenzo would renounce his vengeance in deference to her. A more potent factor was needful to attain that end, such counsel as might, should he turn a deaf ear to it, be converted into menace. She therefore went to Milan to obtain the co-operation of her brother, Duke Gian Galeazzo, and of her powerful uncle, Ludovico il Moro, giving as an ostensible reason for her departure her desire to revisit her family and her birthplace, in which there had been so many changes since she left it, as a maiden of fifteen, ten years ago, and also to see her mother Lucrezia Landriani, and her sister Stella. She added that she hoped to bring them back to live with her in Romagna, so that she might have some of her own people about her. In the beginning of April she arrived at Milan, with a numerous escort. In May she heard that Girolamo had fallen ill at Imola. Catherine did not hesitate a moment in leaving Milan and the dear delights of the Court. Neither the persuasions of her relations, nor the weakness inherent on her condition, could dissuade her from hurriedly riding back to Imola. She was at her husband's bedside on May 31.

The Count had been given up by the doctors. "But," says Bernardi, "no sooner had her ladyship arrived, (although) it appeared that nothing had been left undone, (than) she sent

all over Italy for the best physicians, who came from Bologna, Milan and Ferrara."

The castellane of the Fortress of Rivaldino at Forli was one Melchior Zocchejo of Savona, an old ex-pirate and persecutor of poor Christians, whom the Count, his countryman and creditor, had placed there because he had no other means of repaying him. This castellane was an incubus to Girolamo, who therefore resorted to the daring of his wife to rid himself of him. One night, when the Count was still ill, Catherine mounted her horse, rode to Forli and approaching the fortress, called the castellane.

The castellane came to the battlements and cried, "Oh, Madonna, what is your will?"

Madonna replied, saying, "Misser Marchonne," [the spelling is Cobelli's] "I come on behalf of my lord, that you may surrender the fortress to me. Here is the countersign. I would enter."

Replied the castellane: "And what of the Count? I have heard that he is dead."

Said Madonna: "*Mo* (sic), that is not true. I left him of good courage."

Replied the castellane: "Report hath it that he is dead. If he be dead, I will hold the fort for his sons; if alive, I will give it up to him; if he would turn me out to put another in my place, I would that he should give me my money that I lent unto him, and then I will give up the fort according to my will and pleasure." Without another word he turned and left the battlements, and Catherine "rode sadly back to Imola."

In those days there abode in Forli that same Innocenzo Codronchi who, in the reign of Sixtus, had been constable of St. Angelo, whence he had been dismissed by Catherine. The Count had restored him to favour, appointed him Captain of his guard and Castellane of Ravaldino until the threats and importunities of Melchior Zocchejo induced Girolamo to replace him by the ex-pirate. By order of the Count, Codronchi still came and went within the fort, never losing sight of the

castellane, with whom he often dined, supped and threw dice. The castellane, unconscious of this surveillance, had the utmost confidence in Innocenzo, one of whose relations lived with him in the fort. On August 10, Codronchi, according to his wont, dined with the castellane, and threw dice for the dinner of the following day, Codronchi being purposely the loser. Next morning he sent quails, partridges and capon to the fort by a soldier named Moscardino, to whom he also gave certain secret instructions. When the castellane saw Moscardino coming, he caused the doors of the fortress to be opened to him, and while the game was being plucked Moscardino "did as he had been bidden."

At the appointed hour Codronchi entered the fort and dined with the castellane. After dinner the castellane rose to his feet. Codronchi,[1] springing up suddenly, clutched him by his middle. A slave (probably a Turk captured by Zocchejo on the high seas) stabbed him two or three times, while Moscardino aimed at his head. Then Codronchi left hold of him and finished him with a blow from a scimitar. Then with his kinsman, the slave and Moscardino (who told the story to Cobelli), Codronchi took possession of the watch-tower, and raising the draw-bridges, remained isolated therein. Calling on the soldiers and household of the murdered castellane, who were in the court below, he cried—"Away with you! away! or, by my troth, we shall cut you in pieces." When they had all fled before a sudden shower of stones and other missiles, Codronchi carefully closed the fort, and with the help of his accomplices threw the body down a well, within a dungeon by the draw-bridge.

Meanwhile the terrified guards and servitors ran to the governor, and in a moment the city rang with the news, which reached the Riario just as Girolamo was convalescent and Catherine near to child-bed. "On that same day," says Cobelli, "Madonna mounted her horse, and by dint of spur and bit, was at Forli by midnight, and rode through the city, to the foot of the fortress, and called Nocente.... Then Nocente came to the battlements and saw Madonna, and said,

[1] Cobelli.

"O Madonna, whom do you seek?" Said Madonna, "O Nocente, for whom do you hold this fort?" Replied Nocente, "For the Lord Octavian." Said Misser Domenico Riccio,[1] "Then is Octavian lord and not the Count?" "Dead or alive, I hold this fort for the Count and his sons." Then, according to Bernardi, Catherine asked why he had killed the castellane. "Madonna, the fort should be confided to a man of brains, and not to drunkards." He here repeated what he had said to the governor. Then Catherine implored him to surrender the fort. Codronchi, full of pity for her condition, replied, gently, "Dear Madonna, for the present I can give you no other reply. . . . O Madonna, go and take your rest and fear nothing. There was no need for Your Ladyship to come hither on this errand. I pray you to dine here with us to-morrow." Then Catherine returned to the city, and having ordered a guard to watch the fort, entered her palace. Simulating prudence, for fear of poison, she ordered a dinner to be carried to the fort for her on the morrow and went to bed at dawn. "They that were with her do aver that Madonna did not sleep that night," says Cobelli. Next day Codronchi intimated that the Countess could only be attended by one maid of honour. Catherine, showing no sign of fear and followed by the maid of honour carrying her food, entered the fort. Codronchi is said to have told every detail of the story at table, where together they concerted a mock surrender and Catherine left the fort, whither she returned after three days, with Tommaso Feo of Savona. To him Codronchi surrendered the fort, and Catherine leaving Feo within, passed out, followed by Codronchi. The courtyard was crowded with an impatient populace. At last Catherine appeared. "The fort," she said, "was lost to me and you, in the hands of this man, from whom I have taken it, leaving in his stead a castellane of my own choosing." The citizens would willingly have learnt more, but that was not vouchsafed to them. The Countess rode away with Codronchi at her side, and behind her a long line of horsemen.

This cruel and ingenious comedy faithfully reflects the

[1] Domenico Gentile Ricci, husband of Violantina Riario and Governor of Forlì.

spirit of the policy of a time that has been defined by Machiavelli in the words: "A statesman must know how to play the fox and the lion." Catherine, one of the hardest-headed politicians of her day, would not be deterred by any scruple from the suppression of her castellane, if he displeased her, nor from having him treacherously assassinated if that means assured the end. As for the consummate strategy of this betrayal, we must remember that the end and aim of human action was enjoyment by means of beauty. The sense of beauty had become the sole factor and criterion of the Italian conscience, whether manifested in art, pleasure, resistance, government, or rascaldom. The people of that day did not understand that a crime can never be beautiful. The ferocity of Ferdinand of Naples, in the conspiracy of his barons, seemed to them horribly beautiful; the perfidy of Cæsar Borgia at Sennigallia, is represented as a masterpiece by Machiavelli, and as *un bellissimo inganno* by Monsignor Paolo Giovio.

There is no mention anywhere, after this event, of Innocenzo Codronchi. Did he meet his death by the hand of an enemy or of Riario, whose secret would thus be buried with him? Even that was then possible.

On the morning after her return to Imola, the sun having risen on August 17, Catherine, who on the previous day had ridden ten miles (and more, if, as was her wont, she avoided Faenza and took the long, rugged mountain road), gave birth to a boy, who was named Francesco Sforza and afterwards surnamed Sforzino.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE CONSPIRACY OF THE ROFFI

In the following September, Count Girolamo, who was of a heavy, lymphatic temperament, and had not completely recovered from his illness, had again taken to his bed, when a messenger arrived from the Governor of Forli. Ordelaffi had struck another blow, by means of certain Roffi, sturdy peasants of Rubano, who had great influence and many adherents among its rural population. They had taken the Cotogni Gate, which had been retaken: five rebels had been hanged and others lay in chains in the fortress. Catherine, who was recovering from childbirth, could not be held back from hurrying to the spot; she sprang into her saddle, threw the rein on her horse's neck and reached Forli in an incredibly short time. Domenico Ricci, ex-governor of Forli, a man of mature age, but a bold and skilful rider, could scarcely keep up with the Countess. Giuliano Feo, the new governor, who rode to meet her "neither dead nor alive from fear,"[1] accompanied her to the palace and gave an account of what had happened. The Countess said that she should without delay proceed to further inquiry, but not on that day, as it was Sunday. Early next morning she entered the fort and cross-examined the rebels. They confessed everything. "Why," said Catherine, "did you cry 'San Marco, Church and Ordelaffi'?" "Because," they replied, "we thought that part of the people would have risen to that cry." Nino, one of the Roffi, related that on a certain day he had met another

[1] Cobelli, who with Bernardi was an eye-witness of the events narrated in this chapter.

peasant, named Passi, to whom he had divulged the plot, and that the same Passi had entered into it. Catherine remanded the accused and ordered Passi to be brought into the fort. On the following day the poor wretch was caught, bound and brought into Forli. In the presence of Catherine, Nino recognized him and repeated the accusation. "Now do you lie in your throat," said Passi, "ribald glutton that thou art. I have not set eyes on you for eight months. And this I am willing to prove by the test of the rope." The Countess at once ordered Nino to be hung. Nino gave himself up for lost, and not daring to address the Countess, retracted to the podesta his statement, adding, "Madonna, for the sake of the relations (of Passi, who were many and influential), will pardon him and me, who have accused him. . . . The drowning man catches at a straw." At these words the Countess rose from her seat, and with smiles and some emotion approached Passi, whom she led by the hand out of the fort, saying to him, in the presence of the assembled people, "Go, return in peace to your wife and children. And," adds Bernardi, "she gave him her blessing for a true and faithful servant." Catherine sent a written account of the second trial to her husband, whose answer was delayed for three days ; at last he wrote, saying that as he had sent her in the interests of true justice she might do as it seemed best to her. That was enough for this woman of twenty-five, convinced as she was of her duty in the dispensation of divine justice, which had been pressed, so to speak, into the service of her political needs. Part of this duty was the punishment of those who attacked the rights of the House of Riario, "And then in the name of God," said Bernardi, "the Countess had the heads of six malefactors struck off in the square, and their bodies quartered." Much against his will, and to his infinite mortification, the corporal who had lost the Cotogni Gate to the rebels was made their executioner. The mutilated corpses were left on the ground until evening, when three of the heads were raised on lances and the bodies hung from the Cotogni Gate, and three others from the Gates of San Pietro and Ravaldino. When

this came to the ears of the Countess, she ordered that the horrid sight be at once removed from the eyes of the populace and showed herself as lenient in her treatment of the lesser culprits as she had been inexorable to the ringleaders. Many were set free, but the kinsmen of the Roffi were forbidden the city.

Count Girolamo did not recover until the beginning of November. He was so weak physically, and so weighed down mentally, that for many months none but Catherine entered his room. The report of his death, which was supposed to be kept secret for political reasons, gained such credence that as soon as he could sit his horse, he rode all over Imola, to show himself, and for this purpose went to Forli on November 3. There he soon perceived that his presence inflamed the general dissatisfaction with the taxes. Since he had no longer the means to be generous, he made another bid for popular favour by solicitude for the public weal, and this gave rise to a singular episode.

On the evening of November 18, a young hermit, blond and haggard, holding in his hand an iron cross, arrived at Forli. He was from Sienna, and was called Giovanni Novello. He halted in the burying-ground of St. Mercurial and began to preach, recommending the building of a *Monte di Pietà*, a house where the poor might pledge their things for money. He was soon surrounded by a crowd. While he preached, Count Girolamo stood at a window of the palace with the Milanese Orator. At another, Catherine, with her children, her eye fixed on the preacher, listened attentively. By order of the Riario, all the shops had been closed ; silence reigned and the voice of the hermit filled the vast square. The Count ordered the hermit to preach a second time at the church of San Francesco and, through him, announced that he would contribute three hundred gold ducats towards the erection of the *Monte di Pietà*. He also sent him to the council to renew the offer, and his auditor to speak in praise of it. But the council received these overtures as an attempt to coerce them, and the proposal was

not accepted. The Count was more embittered by this repulse than he would have been by a rebellion, while Catherine recognized in it a discourteous manifestation of civic independence, intended to teach the Count that they were not to be won over by his liberality.

# CHAPTER XIII

## THE ASSASSINATION OF GIROLAMO RIARIO

In January 1488, the peasantry, instigated by the emissaries of Lorenzo Medici, came in troops to Forli and demanded of the Count that they should be relieved from the taxes requiring that each *villa*, or parish, should furnish a certain number of cartloads of wood, barley, forage and straw for the use of the lord and the soldiers of his guard. When he heard that they had sold their lands to the citizens,[1] and that they neither owed nor owned the wherewithal to pay, he said—"This is a just demand; you cannot pay for what you do not own; I will do the best I can to set the matter right." And he cast about for advice, but the councillors and the city were divided among themselves.

"He who persuades you to listen to the peasants is prompted by the devil to lead you to break your neck and ours and bring about a revolution. Give no heed to him. Your lordship has it all your way; what do you want more? The populace is quiet, asking no more than its daily bread, and to be your friends and partisans. Do not mind the peasants, for so long as the citizens and artisans agree, the others will dree their weird. Let those pay who are accustomed to pay, give them good words, and take no further heed. . . ."

"O, Messer Ludovico," replied the Count, "there never was a wash but that you soiled it; God help us! I believe that you grudge me my life." And having said this, he turned upon his heel and went into his chamber. Ludovico Orsi

[1] The citizens were divided into two classes, nobles and artisans, there being no middle-class.

hastened home, where (in the presence of Cobelli, who was giving a dancing lesson to the youthful daughter-in-law of Checco) he repeated this conversation to his brother. In Lent Girolamo summoned Checco Orsi and asked him for the two hundred gold ducats due from him on the meat tax of the preceding year. Orsi replied that he had lost by it, and after a violent altercation, went home in a rage, which he communicated to his brother Ludovic, who was still smarting under his own grievance. "The flea was already in their ears," says Cobelli, who here interpolates a series of serio-comic anecdotes on the growing disquietude of the Orsi, to whom the agents of Medici interpreted every word that fell from the Count's lips as portending their death. One day, Checco Orsi ventured out of doors and whom should he meet in the square but the Count, who was returning from mass.

"Don't you think it is time?" said the latter, alluding to the debt.

"I'm expecting the money from day to day," replied Checco.

Then the Count flew into a violent passion, and crying, "Checco, Checco, you will drive me to commit an act of folly," angrily turned into the palace.

Soon after, Giacomo Ronchi, captain of a squadron, presented himself, and begged for, at least, a part of his pay, adding that his family was dying of hunger. The Count, who had not yet recovered from the recent meeting in the square, replied—"Get out of my sight, or I will have thee hanged."

"My Lord," retorted the soldier, "thieves and traitors are hanged, of which I am neither. I deserve to die sword in hand, like the valiant man-at-arms that I am."

Some time passed, when a certain Ludovico Panzechi, a captain of infantry, who had been employed by Girolamo in the conspiracy of the Pazzi, came, in ignorance of the storm in the air, and also asked the Count for some arrears of his pay. "Ah! you want to levy blackmail," said the Count, thinking that they had agreed among themselves to coerce him. Panzechi did not reply, but went away biting his lips.

The narrow social margin of the little city soon brought

about a meeting between the two officers and the Orsi. And the devil in hell rejoiced to see his design marching to its end, says the "eye-witness."[1] Each told his tale to the others and caught fire from one another; individual fear and tremors melted into the common terror. "That man will hang us," said the two soldiers, who regretted, Panzechi to have left the Florentine, and Ronchi the Calabrian service, for that of Riario, who threatened them with the gallows when they asked for their pay. Checco Orsi had even more cause for complaint. "He had served Riario, with horse and foot, without pay; he had leased that cursed meat tax to right himself, was ruined by it . . . and the Count wanted money into the bargain."

"O Checco," said Panzechi, with a significant gesture, "shall we give him the money that he needs?" And so, with few words, they agreed to kill him, and the three, arm-in-arm, went to seek Ludovico Orsi, who had not dared to leave his house. Ludovic, who at first was like one dazed with horror, at last ejaculated—"And if we fail?"

"Better to die sword in hand than by hanging," replied the other three. "It is better to do so to him than that he should do it to us."

"Onward then!" said Ludovic, "and success attend us!"

"I am sure of the result," said Ronchi. . . . "The people hate the Count because of the taxes. . . . Arm your friends in secret. Watch and wait. We will hasten the matter. When all is ready, we will come out with your following to the cry of 'Liberty! Liberty!' We will sack the palace and you will take the square. At that cry all will join us, and we shall have won the day."

The four conspirators were anxious to strike the blow before their adherents had time to cool down, or the secret to leak out, and to that end kept an eye on the Count from the following morning (Sunday *in albis*, April 13), but without success. On April 14, at dinner-time, Ronchi parted from his friends and went to see his nephew, Gasparino, a youth in the

[1] Leone Cobelli.

household of the Count. "Gasparino," he said, "you know how often we have wanted to talk to the Count about our own affairs and how we have always been withheld by the presence of one or the other. At what hour could I speak to him without witnesses to talk over our grievances?" "To-night," replied Gasparino, "after supper the Count will be alone, the household and the equerries will be at supper; I shall be on guard at the door of his chamber. So you can come to-night to talk over matters with the Count." "Good. But how shall I know when?" "I will signal to you when the time comes; be ready in the square."

Ronchi informed the others of his appointment. Towards sunset armed partisans made their way one by one to the square. Checco Orsi, captain of the guard, stationed them as he pleased, without fear of opposition, and sent his cousin, Deddo, to occupy the staircase that led to the tower communicating with the apartments of Catherine. Doctor Ludovico Orsi was stationed at the foot of the grand staircase. The fatal hour had struck. The Count was still at supper with his wife; the three assassins (Checco Orsi, Panzechi and Ronchi), armed to the teeth, paced forwards and backwards in the square without showing themselves to those in the palace window, yet keeping an eye on it. At last Gasparino, waving his *béret*, signed to Ronchi to come. The three companions moved resolutely towards the palace door, climbed the stairs and stood at the door of the Hall of the Nymphs; the Count was within. The Orsi, foremost among the citizens and intimates of the Count, had a right to enter unannounced, they held, according to the phrase of the day, *the gilded key*. Checco, leaving his two companions to listen outside, boldly opened the door. The Count, with his back to the open window, his elbow resting on the sill that looked towards Ravenna, was enjoying the cool of the evening, with his kinsman, Corradino Feo, of Savona, his chancellor, Girolamo of Casale, and Nicolò of Cremona, who was in waiting. The Count was chatting with his friends and was unarmed, his countenance merry and jovial. . . . It would have been the right moment to ask a favour of him, so well

disposed did he seem to listen and to grant it. Indeed, as soon as he perceived that Checco had entered the room, he stretched out his right hand to him, saying with cordiality—"How goes it, my Checco?" "I have a letter that I would show you," replied Checco; "we shall soon have the money . . . and I shall be able to pay Your Lordship. . . ." While he was speaking, Orsi grasped the dagger that he had hidden about his person, and the Count felt his blade in the left breast, which, in offering his hand, he had exposed to the blow.

"Ha, traitor!" cried the wounded man, who would have sought refuge by dragging himself to Catherine's chamber, but that the two listeners behind the door, hearing his cry, broke into the room and seizing the victim by the hair, dragged him back to the spot where the first blow had been struck. The wound was not mortal, but in his horror and dismay, Checco was incapable of striking another. The two soldiers who knew their business better, and that in these affairs it is not well to stop midway, crushed him to the ground between door and window and barbarously finished him with murderous blows on his head and every vital part. Not a word could escape the lips of the wretched man, who struggled for escape for a few seconds, until his dying eyes were fixed upon the assassins; while, more ferocious and savage than Ronchi, Ludovico Panzechi still steeped his blade in the blood of the victim. Ten years earlier, in that same month of April, Girolamo Riario, who was hatching the famous conspiracy of the Pazzi, had paid money, and made promises to Ludovico Panzechi to plunge that same dagger into the heart of Lorenzo Medici. This was the end, at the age of forty-five, of Girolamo Riario, who in the lifetime of Sixtus, while he was yet the omnipotent nephew of the Pope and master of the armies and treasure of the Church, had been a villain, yet whose rule in Romagna must, on the whole, be considered a mild and beneficent one. Danger had taught him prudence; prudence had taught him humanity. Yet all his greatness was the devil's harvest; he had sown too much evil to reap anything but thorns and tribulations. All his efforts were tardy and

unavailing ; the agents of the new Pope—who, like Sixtus, had a nephew of whom he would have made a prince—represented him to the people, whose fidelity Riario had wooed by his benevolence, in the most odious colours. Besides, the Medici still coveted Imola ; above all they would have wrested it from Riario who had sought to compass their annihilation when he coveted Florence for himself. His State had teemed with Florentine spies and emissaries, sent to prepare the vengeance of Lorenzo Medici. Generosity, which was then considered necessary to the art of government, had brought about the financial ruin of Girolamo, of which the question of the taxes was the inevitable consequence, as well as the opportunity awaited by his enemies. Even as the Pazzi, in 1478, had been the emissaries of Riario in the plot against the Medici, so on the evening of April 14, 1488, the Orsi, with Panzechi and Ronchi, became the emissaries of the Medici in the assassination of Girolamo Riario.

# BOOK IV

## CATHERINE'S WIDOWHOOD

## CHAPTER XIV

### CATHERINE AND THE ASSASSINS

THE murder was committed in a few seconds. The suspicions of the chancellor and of Nicolò of Cremona were not awakened by the entrance of Orsi, but when the two others broke into the room they realized what was happening and took to flight. Nicolò ran to the apartment of Catherine and in a choking voice told her that Orsi, Panzechi, and Ronchi had murdered the Count. There was no time to lose in tears. There was no doubt that they meant to exterminate the whole family . . . they must save themselves.

Catherine sprang to her feet, succeeded in blocking the door with chests, arm-chairs, and cabinets of prodigious weight, and ordered all the servants to arm themselves and pursue the assassins, so that none of them might escape with his life. And, counting on help from the people, she placed the women, children, and defenceless people at the windows, to cry: "Help! Help! They have murdered the Count! They are trying to murder Madonna! Help! Help!"

While the widow of the murdered man gave such evidence of promptness and foresight, the murderers, dazed and confused, had not left the body. Corradino Feo, son and lieutenant of the castellane of Ravaldino, heard the Count's cry from the room next to the Hall of the Nymphs and returned to it, but lost his voice when his eyes fell upon the dreadful sight. As soon as he recovered, he placed himself at the head of four servants of the Countess, and calling to arms, prepared to attack the assassins. The palace was full

of rushing sounds, cries and the clank and clash of arms. Gasparino, who, in his ignorance, had given the fatal sign, first realized its meaning when he saw his uncle, fully armed, place himself outside the Count's door. At the same moment he heard the cry of the victim, and Ronchi, before he entered, told him to inform Ludovico Orsi, who was waiting at the foot of the stairs, that the Count had been dispatched. In blind obedience, Gasparino had descended the stair and with terror and amazement said to Ludovico: "They are killing him! . . . . he must be dead already!" Then came the cries of Catherine. The blow had been struck, it behoved Ludovic to save his friends, and he went out to summon in their defence those who waited in the square.

Meanwhile Agamemnon degli Orsi, son of Checco, impatient with standing in passive custody of the grand staircase, hastened to the protection of his father, meeting, as he mounted the stair, the affianced husband of Stella Landriani, Andrea Ricci, whose rooms were at the top of the staircase. Hearing cries of "Help! Help!" he had seized his arms and was on his way down-stairs before he knew what had happened. But he instantly realized it and did not hesitate to strike Agamemnon, who died from his wound twelve days later. Ricci, although wounded, succeeded in joining Corradino and the four servants, and with them entered the Hall of the Nymphs and surrounded the three assassins who stood over the body of their victim. They would have been cut to pieces in a moment, but for the arrival of Ludovico Orsi and his followers, who broke into the Hall, to the cry of "Liberty! Liberty! Long live the Orsi!" Corradino Feo and Andrea, who were both wounded, had to retire before overwhelming numbers. The new cry, different to the one that had issued from the windows of Catherine, announced to the whole city that the conspirators were masters of the palace and that the fortunes of the Riario were fallen.

As the news spread, men armed with pikes and clubs and the usual herd of the curious, who never fail to put in an appearance on occasions of terror or rejoicing, poured into the square, from every corner of it. Among the latter was the

chronicler, Leone Cobelli, who in his eagerness to see, "so that he might write," had pushed his way through the crowd until he found himself standing under the great doorway of the palace, where stood Checco Orsi, wearing a coat of mail and holding a partisan. He was soon joined by Ludovic, and all, as they arrived, kissed them on the face and congratulated them, saying: "Fear nothing, we, all of us, will defend you; we have determined, for your sakes, to meet death and destruction!" And they cried, "Liberty for ever! Long live the Orsi, true Fathers of our Country!" The crowd whence came these cries was entirely composed of artisans. None of the nobles had appeared in the square. They awaited the end of the tumult behind closed doors, in fear and trembling of the Orsi.

Cobelli pushed his way into the courtyard and there he saw "Madonna, la Contessa, weeping and crying at her window, with her women. All her servants were in flight. And," he continues, "I soon found myself at the corner of the *loggia* where the well is at the foot of the grand staircase, and suddenly I beheld Messer Antonio de Montechio, the *bargello* (lieutenant of police), flying before a murderous gang of artisans. He had but mounted three stairs, when he was laid low by a hundred blows from partisans, pikes, spears and swords." Cobelli heard a cry from the window, and raising his eyes saw Catherine desperately calling: "Forbear, forbear! do not kill him!" But none gave heed to her cry. Instead, they stripped the body to its shift, and dragging it, before it was yet cold, to the well, set fire to the beautiful hair of which the poor *bargello* had been so proud. Then some peasants came upon the scene, who, although they saw that he was dead, tore the flesh from his body. "Then," continues Cobelli, "I saw Checco de l'Urso with the whole gang and Matio de Galasso mount those stairs and enter the chamber of Madonna." Catherine was alone, with her mother, sister, children and two nurses. The door was barricaded, but the conspirators burst it open and seized Catherine and her children. It is recorded that before she moved, she kissed each of her children and then went on in front, between Checco Orsi

and Galasso. The crowd, awed by the majesty of that delicate and beautiful face, made way in silence for the Countess.

Neither insult nor violence was offered to her or hers. Only one of the ruffians in the suite of Checco Orsi thrust his hand in the bosom of Stella's gown in the search for hidden jewels. The young girl pushed him back with all the strength of her left hand, dealing him with her right so vigorous a blow that she nearly knocked the wretch's teeth out.

Thus, on foot, at dead of night, Catherine was conducted to the house of the Orsi, which stood on the site of what is now the *Monte di Pietà*, and Checco Orsi was lord of the city. After the horrid murder of the *bargello,* the soldiers of the guard and other members of the household had withdrawn to the fortress, whither went also Corradino Feo, Andrea Ricci, Francesco Paolucci, and in haste and secrecy a certain Ludovico Ercolani, with the mission of enjoining on Tommaso Feo, the castellane, to write informing Bentivoglio of Bologna and the Duke of Milan of the murder of the Count, entreating them in the name of the Countess to send sufficient troops to quell the revolution and reinstate her.

No sooner had Catherine left the palace than the plunder began ; one seized a chest, another a casket, every one something. The treasury of the customs and taxes was plundered, even to the chains and ropes of the clock on the tower. Gold, silver, and linen, "with the exception of the body-linen of Madonna and her children," all disappeared, and the horses and mules were taken from the stables. While Cobelli was looking at the sacking of the palace he perceived a strange and terrible sound. The body of Count Girolamo had been thrown into the square. Three of his (the Count's) favourite men-at-arms, Ciccolini, Carlo of Imola, and Scossacarri, had entered the Hall of the Nymphs and thrown the corpse to the people, crying: "This is that traitor who so persecuted us!" Hardly had they done so when a certain Pagliarino, nephew to Ronchi, dragged the body on the ground to where, despite a cry of horror from those present, it was stripped and mutilated, as had been that of the *bargello.* Some monks of the order of the Black Flagellants placed the two corpses on

the same bier and carried it to the sacristy of their church which, says Burriel, "is the same that is now known as the Church of the Nuns of Corpus Domini." It was night, and none barred the way to the bier.

This sinister spectacle caused a short interruption in the sacking of the palace, which soon began again with renewed clamour and rapacity. Doors and windows were wrenched from their hinges, every one robbed and destroyed all that he could lay hands upon ; the Orsi, abetted by their retainers,



PALACE OF THE PODESTA.

robbed more than any one else. When the intoxicated crowd happened to light upon money, plaudits and hurrahs for the Orsi, Fathers of the People, rent the air.

Later, the Orsi summoned the council : Checco, in a pompous harangue, boasted of having put to death a ferocious tyrant, and declared that the city should be given to none but the Pope, and only to him in nominal suzerainty. He offered the people of Forli autonomy and self-government.

The chief magistrate, Nicolò Tornielli, replied with spirit and wisdom that the Duke of Milan was capable of becoming the avenger of his sister's wrongs ; that in Rome there were many cardinals who were related and allied to the Riario, and that the Pope himself appeared well disposed towards them. Autonomy and liberty may have flourished in the city in by-gone times ; but the liberty so eulogized by the Orsi had begun in bloodshed, would not last eight days, and would make Forli and its magistracy the laughing-stock of the proletariat of every other Italian city. Whatever be the resolution they came to, it had best be "one that would not further irritate nor wound the Countess. That would not only be barbarous and inhuman, but would draw down fatal consequences upon the city, she being of subtle mind and of that high courage that was known to all, indomitable of spirit and inexorable in vengeance." He added that the only course open to them lay in submission to the Pope, as their direct and immediate sovereign, without grimace of popular liberty. The city should, with all due and legal formality, be consigned to Monsignor Savelli, protonotary and papal governor of Cesena. The council unanimously applauded and accepted the suggestion of Tornielli, to the indignation of the populace and the Orsi, who were still blinded and intoxicated by their victory. The act of allegiance was immediately drawn up and sent to Cesena. It surprised and perplexed Savelli who, however, recognizing the seal of the city and the signatures of the councillors, sent his auditor to Forli on the 15th. The latter, in the presence of the assembled council, took possession of the city in the name of the Governor of Cesena, by the ancient rite of walking several times round the square, and returned to that place.

Savelli, on hearing the account of the auditor, determined to conclude that which had been begun, and arriving at Forli before nightfall, proceeded at once to Casa Orsi, to pay his respects to the Countess, both because of her great misfortune and because, as the Pope's representative, it behoved him to recognize the sovereign rights of the Riario as vicars of the Church. He expressed to the Countess, whom he had known

in Rome, his horror and sorrow at the appalling event, and excused himself for the haste of his coming in that as the Pope's legate, he could not appear to neglect the unsought gift which the city had made of itself to the Holy See. On the other hand, although he had been constrained to accept this gift from the people of Forli to the Pope, there was nothing to prevent His Holiness from confirming the children of the Count in the investiture of their father's dominions . . . . and next to his obedience to the Pontiff, there was nothing nearer to his (Savelli's) heart than his desire to render aid, service, and all that was possible of solace and comfort to the Countess.

The sincere ring of these words of pity and respect so far mitigated her bitterness that Catherine,[1] with modest integrity and directness, made such reply as her circumstances demanded, in words few and serious, and in no wise offensive. The sight of the young mother, to whom clung six terrified orphans whom she strove to comfort and console,—for in the house of her husband's murderers they were surrounded on all sides by guards armed with pikes and halberds,—so moved the worthy prelate that no sooner had he left them than he could not restrain himself from declaring to those concerned that "the Orsi were wild beasts in human form, than whom no Turks could have worse entreated Madonna." And having mounted his horse and ridden once round the square to confirm the possession taken of the city by his auditor, he passed onward to the Gate of St. Peter. There he relieved the guard by another composed of twelve artisans commanded by three noblemen who were held in high esteem in the city, and at the same time personally devoted to the Countess. Bartolomeo Capoferri, Bartolomeo Serughi and Francesco Denti were soon to prove themselves worthy of his confidence. Savelli further enjoined on the Orsi to hold Catherine no longer a prisoner under their own roof, but to immediately conduct her to the Fort of St. Peter and there confide her to the honourable custody of the three gentlemen by him instructed to treat her with the respect due to her rank and

[1] Burriel.

her misfortunes. These considerations had not withheld another priest, a partisan of the Orsi, from forcing his way into Catherine's room during Savelli's short absence, and seeking by intimidation to obtain the surrender of the Fortress of Ravaldino. "Count Girolamo's sins had found him out," said this priest to the widow; "therefore, my sister, make up your mind to yield up this stronghold to us; for you will neither eat nor drink until you have caused it to be surrendered to us, and we shall let you die of hunger."

Catherine, in her anguish, could find no voice to answer him, but at last, regaining her power of speech, was able to cry: "O Misser Ludovico, I pray you, for the love of God, deliver me from this priest!" Catherine, who in happier times recounted this episode to her friends and retainers, was wont to say that the words of this priest had hurt her almost more than the murder of her husband.

Catherine was then led by Ludovico and Checco Orsi, Panzechi, and Ronchi, before the papal governor (Monsignor Savelli) to be publicly interrogated, and as she was now awaiting the succour she had demanded from Milan and Bologna, was able, in calm expectation of the result of her foresight, to make such promises and replies as were imposed upon her under penalty of death. She was next conducted to the Fortress of Ravaldino, which she had secretly instructed Tommaso Feo to hold at any cost. When, therefore, the latter appeared at the battlements the Countess cried:

"Surrender the fortress to these people, to save my life and the lives of my children!"

"They can take me from here in pieces!" replied the castellane. "I will not yield an inch."

"They will murder me!"

"Whom will they murder? They have too much reason to fear the Duke of Milan."

At these words he disappeared from the battlements, but the late captain of Catherine's guard, who knew her as well as did the castellane, fixed his eyes upon her face and the point of his partisan on her breast.

"O Madonna Caterina," he cried, "if you chose he would give it to us, but 'tis you who will not let him surrender; I have a mind to bore thee through and through with this partisan, and to make thee fall down dead."

The Countess replied, without sign of anger or alarm—

"O Jacomo da Ronco, do not frighten me; deeds canst do unto me, but canst not frighten, for I am daughter to one who knew no fear. You have killed my lord, you may as well kill me, who am a woman."

Finding that they could do nothing with her, the conspirators reconducted her to their house. Meanwhile Monsignor Savelli superintended the works for the capture of Ravaldino, which were continued throughout the night. On the following morning, April 16, the same scene was re-enacted under the walls of the Fort of Schiavonia.

"Castellane, give up the fort to these people," cried Catherine to Bianchino and his brother, who held it, "and I shall be content."

"O Madonna, Your Ladyship will forgive us, you never gave us this fortress, nor will we give it to you, nor to any one. Retire, or we shall shoot. O Messer Ludovico, retire!"

At that moment the great parish bell rang to assemble the council, to which Monsignor Savelli, as papal governor, was also bidden. As no succour had as yet arrived from the Pope, it was decided to send some citizens to Rome to invoke it. Soon after, according to the orders of Savelli, Catherine and her family were conducted to the Fortress of St. Peter, where they were received with reverent pity by the three gentlemen to whom they had been confided by Savelli. Catherine, her six children (the two youngest in the arms of their nurses), her mother, her half-sister Stella and Scipio (a natural son of Count Girolamo), were all confined in a small room, built in the thickness of the wall of a tower which rose above the gate. The terrors of the night had dried up the nurses' milk, the children sobbed and cried, and there was no change of linen, nor bedding for Sforzino, the youngest babe. In her despair the haughty Countess implored the compassion and help of her neighbours, and a cradle was immediately

brought her from the house of a certain Achille Bighi. Even the guards were touched with pity. "Who could be so hard of heart," says Bernardi, "but that he would not have felt some compassion for the said poor Madonna!" At last Catherine was able to quiet her babies, but the elder children still clung in terror to their mother, while her mother and sister started at every sound, dreading the entrance of armed men and the nearness of death.

But Catherine, delivered from the clutches of the Orsi, spoke brave words to her children, her sister, and her mother. And she was heard to comfort them, saying, that they "should fear no more, for they were no longer in the hands of traitors, but in the care of men of honour, whom she knew. Danger was over; they must neither have nor show fear, which was worse. . . . Muzio Attendolo and Duke Francesco, their forebears, had never been known to lose their fortitude; they had not known the meaning of fear . . . and that is why they had always been proof against steel, fire and treason, and in their day had been great princes and great *condottieri*. . . . Their uncle, the Duke, would send hundreds and hundreds of armed men, with cannon and guns and famous captains to their rescue. Her father, like theirs, had also been assassinated in her childhood. Yet she had not lost courage . . . neither should they!"

When Catherine had somewhat comforted her people, she began to think how she could turn the change in her circumstances to her advantage. She was now guarded by honourable citizens, faithful to their charge, yet kindly and reverently minded to her. She realized that Savelli and the Orsi coveted the possession of the fortresses, and that, through her, they would again attempt to persuade the castellanes to surrender. Could she but find a pretext to enter the fortress of Ravaldino! That and the arrival of help from Milan would be fatal to the plans of her enemies. Absorbed in this thought, she confided in a loyal servitor, who fortunately happened to be near her at the time, says the historian Bernardi, in a manner which permits us to infer that he was

himself this loyal servant. Him she dispatched to the castellane, to warn him that she would certainly be again led in front of the fortress, which, if she could but enter, would save the situation. She therefore enjoined on him to concert with Francesco Ercolani, who was with him at Ravaldino, as to her possible mode of entrance. They agreed that upon the following day, Ercolani would see the governor, and inform him that the Castellane of Ravaldino, considering the great danger to which the Countess was exposed, and the impossibility of holding the fort against the impending army of the Pope, was ready to surrender, but as he came of a stock in which there had been no traitor, he would neither be nor appear one. He would therefore do the bidding of the Countess, and give up the fortress, but before doing so he demanded an interview with Madonna to settle his affairs, receive his salary, and receive from Madonna a written certificate of his honourable service, so that he might show himself in any company and none would dare to call him traitor.

Having thus agreed, Ercolani hastened to communicate the agreement to Catherine, who approved it, and to the Governor, who promised not only that Catherine should enter the fort, but that he would induce the Orsi to take her there on that same morning. Ercolani, on leaving Savelli, proceeded to the Orsi, who, knowing Catherine too well to trust her within the fort, absolutely refused her any private colloquy with the castellane. They would take her outside, where she could speak with him, as before, in public. Ercolani then appeared before Tornielli and the magistracy to acquaint them with the proposals of the castellane. "Now our blockheads believed his words to be the truth," says Cobelli, and promised that they would do all that was necessary, "and more," to carry out this plan. "Then," adds Cobelli, "I went away to dinner, for it was late."

Meanwhile two confidential persons, Luca d'Este and a certain Luigi, came and went at will, to inform Catherine of everything that happened, a proof that the severity of her custody was somewhat relaxed, and that her jailers closed

one eye. Even Savelli, who went forwards and backwards on the ramparts, directing the work of the batteries, perceived this coming and going without preventing it.

At about eleven in the forenoon the Orsi, accompanied by Ercolani and their usual escort of conspirators, went to conduct Catherine by the road outside the walls to the fortress. The castellane appeared at the battlements. Catherine, almost weeping, entreated him to surrender the fort to Monsignor the Governor, the Pope's representative.

The castellane repeated that he would do nothing of the kind. "Ah!" said Catherine, "if I might but enter the fortress and speak to you without witnesses, I would explain to you how things stand, and persuade you to surrender!" "In that case," said the castellane, "I know not what I might do, but in any case I should be guided by the conditions you might propose to me. Besides, I have already declared to the Governor and every one that, to make an end of it, I am willing for you to enter the fortress, on condition that you come alone."

When the Orsi heard this they loudly opposed those who advocated sending the Countess within. They knew her too well . . . they feared her too much. Once within her fortress, would she come out of it again? But, says Bernardi, they took heart of grace, remembering that she would leave her children in their hands, and yet could not make up their minds. "What are you afraid of?" queried Ercolani. "Have you not all her children in your hands? Do you think she would abandon them? Give her three hours with the castellane. If, when that time has elapsed, the Countess does not return, do what you will to her children, her mother and sister. Do not these hostages suffice? I offer you my children as well. If the Countess is not here at the appointed time you can butcher them all together."

"Where is the need that you should offer your children to us?" replied the Orsi. "Are you not, as well as your children, in our hands?" This discussion, which took place in the presence of Catherine, so grew in length and violence that at the sound of the contending voices Monsignor Savelli, who

never left the neighbourhood of the fortress, appeared upon the scene. His authority decided the question, and gave Catherine the right of entry to the fort. He announced that he had observed certain persons going to and fro from the fort to Catherine, and he was aware that the castellane had already agreed to surrender. And it behoved them, above all, to deprive the Duke of Milan of the slightest pretext for displeasure, such as might arise from the prolonged imprisonment of his sister, or a refusal to permit her to treat for the surrender with the castellane.

The Orsi could not, dared not, withstand this order, but they swore, cursed, and were consumed with anger. Three hours and no more were granted to Catherine in which to settle everything with her castellane.

In a second Catherine's countenance underwent a complete change. Rising to her full height, she resolutely approached and crossed the draw-bridge; then turning to hurl a gesture of insult at the assassins, proudly entered the castle, followed by a single attendant, her faithful Luca d'Este.[1]

[1] Cobelli had "gone to dinner, because it was late. But one way, or another, Madonna entered the fort . . . and according to Ludovico Hercolano, no sooner had the Countess mounted the bridge than she turned and . . . . When I had dined, I picked up my lance and returned to the fort, where Misser Ludovico and Checco, Jacomo da Ronco, and Ludovico Pansecco waited for Madonna to come out. They had a good waiting."—p. 322.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE LEGEND OF THE FORT

Tommaso Feo and Corradino, his son, who awaited Catherine within the fortress, were her husband's kinsmen and her personal friends. An atmosphere of safety and loyalty revived her spirits, while her presence inspired the whole garrison with renewed courage. Her first thought was to so dispose the artillery (cannon, bombs and mortars) as to command the city. Savelli had confided the custody of her dear ones to three loyal citizens, but in the event of their being overpowered by the conspirators, she would show that she was ready for terrible reprisals, and able to bombard the whole town. For a time, the Countess and the castellane occupied themselves with the transport and disposal of guns and ammunition. At last, when the churches and principal houses of the town were at her mercy, she sat down to dinner with Thomas and Conrad Feo, and was soon joined by Ercolani, who had succeeded in escaping from the Orsi and their braves, and to whose congratulations Catherine replied with thanks for the timely service he had rendered her. After dinner, the castellane persuaded her to take some repose in an isolated room at the top of the *maschio*, or central tower, where no sounds from outside could reach her. Catherine undressed, and youth and fatigue triumphing over her anxieties, was soon asleep in the bed she had found prepared for her. When the three hours had expired, the Orsi began to ask why she did not return, and to call her clamorously. Corradino replied from the ramparts that if

they sent Luffo Numai and Lorenzo Orselli as hostages for Catherine and her children, the castellane would send the Countess to them, otherwise he would keep her in the fortress. The rage of the Orsi at this suggestion was unbounded; Numai and Orselli were among the principal citizens; the demand for them seemed an additional insolence. At last Savelli, the Orsi and their myrmidons, irritated at having been made fools of by Catherine, returned to the city, and there was once more silence outside the fort.

Ercolani having left its precincts and imprudently shown himself in the square, would have been put to death by the knives and partisans of the conspirators, but that he was rescued and conducted to his house by his brother-in-law, Matteo Galasso and the latter's followers.

The legend runs otherwise. In the *Hore di recreatione*[1] of Messer Ludovico Guicciardini, we learn that "the Lady having entered the fortress . . . appeared at the battlements and with exceeding bitter words, reproached the conspirators with the death of her husband, threatening them with every kind of torture. . . . Then they (the Orsi) having taken her children by the hand, did with a knife make pretence of slaying them in her presence if she broke her word with them. But the dauntless Countess, with unchanged countenance, gazed at them defiantly, and lifting her skirt said to them: '*E non vi pare egli, stolti, ch'io abbia le forme da farne degl' altri?*'"

This is the reply repeated by almost every historian. Turn we, therefore, to the records of Cobelli and Bernardi who were present during the stormy episodes of that day.

The only means which Savelli, in concert with the Orsi, could devise to compass the surrender of the fort by Catherine, was to threaten to murder her children, mother and sister, under her eyes. Checco Orsi, followed by many others, went to San Pietro, and in the names of the governor and the council, demanded the mother and sister of Catherine, her two eldest children and a nurse who was particularly dear to the Countess. They were led to weep and cry in the

[1] *Consiglio feminino esser talhora di gran valore*, p. 208.

moat of Ravaldino. First the nurse, then Stella, and finally Octavian were employed to entreat Madonna to "surrender the fort to Monsignore and for the love of God to save their lives." Instead of Catherine, who was asleep in the remote recesses of the castle, the castellane replied by threat to threat, not to the poor women, whose cries could not waken their lady, but to those who dictated their appeal. But the shrill screams of Octavian made his hair stand on end. What if a mother's love were to sharpen her ears; she would surrender, and all would be over! A subterfuge dawned upon him by which he might deaden all sounds from without, and he ordered all his available soldiers to cry: "Away with you! away! or we shall kill you all," [1] at the same time sending others to make a loud noise under the windows of the tower where Catherine slept.

Neither the conspirators nor the crowd who followed them moved an inch. The castellane, in despair, fired a few shots [2] which dispersed them in terror, when the conspirators turned back and reconducted Catherine's family, unharmed, to the Gate of St. Peter.

These cries had awakened the Countess, who from the seclusion of the maschio thought she could hear her name. . . . She listened, the better to distinguish the sounds, but instead of her name, heard from the draw-bridge a deafening noise and the sound of blows; this was surely the beginning of a battle. . . . She suddenly sprang from her bed and out of the room. In the scanty clothing in which she had slept, with unbound hair and bare feet, she quickly descended the spiral stair that is still to be seen in the chief tower, stopped for a moment at the bottom, and hearing shots . . . in her impatience to know, see, and meet the emergency, crossed the courtyard that was crowded with soldiers, like lightning, and flew to the small tower where the castellane stood by the big cannon.

The castellane perceived her, guessed what had happened, and went to meet her. "What did she fear? . . . why leave

[1] Bernardi, p. 148.

[2] Vecchiazzani, *Storia di Forlimpopoli*, p. 168.

her room? Enemies! Attacks! A handful of drunken soldiers had had a scrimmage among themselves, and he had been obliged to fire a few shots. . . . Yes, the Orsi had come to fetch her, but had gone away peacefully . . . very frightened at the Duke of Milan!" Reassured by the pious lie of the castellane, she was soon seen to retire to her apartments. Her face was calm, she passed serenely in front of the soldiers and soon disappeared.

It would appear that the Countess on reaching the battlements of the tower by the gate was observed by those who stood outside the fortress. In any case, many soldiers of the garrison had seen her in her scant attire. Catherine's admirable defence of the Castle of Forli soon became a sort of epopee, adorned by popular fancy and enriched by the boastful additions of those who had taken any part in it.

It was this version that reached Machiavelli, who was only to make Catherine's personal acquaintance eleven years later: he believed it, and delighted in handing it down to history in its most cynical form. But the narrative of Machiavelli cannot stand against the absolute silence of such contemporaries as Cobelli and Bernardi. The person who appeared and who spoke to the crowd was the castellane; Catherine was not on the battlements, but in bed, and when she did appear, wore, not armour, but her shift, which she was probably the last to perceive. At that moment the dauntless Countess was not alarming, but alarmed.

Cobelli relates that when evening came, Ludovico Orsi called his brother and their associates away from the fort, saying: "Let us go to supper." Savelli remained to direct the work of the barricades, but Cobelli followed the others home, where the supper-tables were laid. Andrea Orsi, the octogenarian father of Ludovico and Checco, arrived from his country house at Casa Murata and seeing his sons with Panzechi and Ronchi washing their hands before they went to table began by saying: "O my sons, what have you done?" "We have done well," replied Ronchi, "for did not the preacher say: 'Who will be that mouse that will bell the

cat?' We have belled the cat and freed the poor mice. We have freed this earth from the hand of Pharaoh!" . . . "O my Father!" added Ludovico, "we have but done to him as he would have done to us." And he told him how the Count had been put to death, and of all the events that had happened up to that moment.

Old Orsi, although he had just recovered from a severe illness and looked as if he were in his dotage, replied, with much wisdom: "My sons, to my mind you have neither done well nor done bravely, but have rather done ill, twice over. First, since you had killed the Count, you should have finished the others or have penned the whole family alive and kept them prisoners. Then you have let Madonna into the fort, to wage deadly war with you, and have banished the Marcobelli and Orzioli, who will return with fire and sword. God help you! I would not have been drawn into it! You have behaved like drivelling infants and will repent and suffer for it; would that others need not suffer, nor I, who am old and ill! I foresee where you will end!" "O Orsi!" cried his hearers, "doubt not but that we know what we have to do!" "No! you know not yet," insisted the old man. "Since you have killed the Count you should have finished them all." These words of Andrea Orsi, repeated to Catherine, enraged her more than ever, confirming her in her belief that all her troubles were due to the bloodthirsty old man, who had encouraged his sons to dye their hands in the blood of the Riario.

On April 17, Catherine, trembling for her children's safety, and knowing of no other means to insure it but the display of her power to avenge them, fired on the town from time to time, by day and night. Several private houses, among which was that of Giovanni Battista Oliva, the great-grandfather of Fabio, Catherine's future biographer, were injured. It was hastily decided to raise barricades and batteries for the protection of the town, and to send to Cesena for battering-rams and a cannon. Monsignor Savelli summoned all the papal soldiers from Cesena and within his jurisdiction. On the following day, these troops arrived

under the command of Count Guido di Bagno, Count Carlo Pian di Meleto and Hector Zampeschi. Since the night of April 15, Savelli had invested eight citizens with full authority, who were to reside day and night in the palace. This was the Council of Eight, of which Mdso Maldenti was president. Some of the members were bold and truculent, others silent and at heart uncertain of the issue, with a foreboding that the Pope would turn a deaf ear, and the sense that the sword of Milan hung over their heads.

Catherine, stronger and more wily than all of them, had seized the fort, whence she could bombard the whole city. All hope of frightening or touching her was at an end.

# CHAPTER XVI

## THE FLIGHT OF THE ORSI

Giovanni Bentivoglio, Lord of Bologna and Catherine's ally, was anxious to avoid displeasing Lorenzo Medici, whom he knew to be the instigator of her husband's death: he also knew that the Florentine was personally favourable to her, and therefore wrote him as follows:

"The death of the quondam (*sic*) Count Hieronymus having occurred in the mode and form of which I know Your Magnificence to be aware, on the said death I will for the present express no opinion, either in praise or blame, preferring to be guided by the wisdom of Your Magnificence. . . ." The ducal orator, resident in Bologna, had begged him to do his utmost to save the States for the children of the Count: he had therefore ridden to Castel San Pietro, five miles from Imola, with Light Horse and infantry, and would "fain know what (under the circumstances) would seem meet to Your Magnificence, and what you consider should be done in the matter. . . ."

Lorenzo did not reply, and Bentivoglio wrote him again on the 19th, from Castel Bolognese, "repeating his prayer, that he might be pleased to communicate to him (Bentivoglio) an inkling of his wise decision and opinion. . . ." These letters prove that Lorenzo was the soul and centre of these intrigues. Why therefore did he not trouble to reply to Bentivoglio? The conditions were altered: the conspiracy of the Pazzi, origin of these feuds, had occurred ten years earlier, and vengeance had fallen when perhaps it was least desired.

Besides, even if he had willed and worked the death of Girolamo, he now desired to avoid the odium of the assassination.

Meanwhile the news of it continued to reach him from other sources. Stefano of Castrocaro wrote him on the 19th, from Faenza, relating a conversation in which Galeotto Manfredi had asserted "that all had happened with the knowledge of Lorenzo." This he, Stefano, had defied him to prove. He added Galeotto's account of the assassination, and ended by stating that the body had been interred in "unconsecrated ground." Galeotto had already, in a letter of the 17th, informed Lorenzo that Bentivoglio had shamefacedly asked his assent to the passage of forces he was sending to the defence of Catherine, but that, "to avoid responsibility," he had replied that he was too busy to see him, and had refused him a right of way through Faenza. He had learned that Bentivoglio would be followed by the Milanese forces: he would write Lorenzo everything that occurred, and would establish a service of couriers by the Marradi road, to carry letters backwards and forwards. He added that Catherine Sforza had entered the fort, and had given out that she would die there; she was regardless of her children's danger, and had opened fire on the city.[1]

On the following day, he wrote again saying that "pending the ebullition," he begged Lorenzo to send a confidential person to him with whom he might confer in any circumstance whatever. He referred to the endurance with which Catherine held the fort.

Lorenzo had already received similar information, regarding Catherine, from Migliore Cresci, captain of Castrocaro, confirmed by three letters of Corbizzi,[2] who wrote that the assassins of the Count looked to him, Lorenzo, for protection. The most important letters are, however, those from Ludovico and Checco Orsi. The assassins did not spare the memory of their "iniquitous and accursed" victim, "whom we will not call Lord, for of that he was unworthy." They openly alluded to the part played by Girolamo in the conspiracy of

[1] Doc. 258. [2] Docs. 260, 261, 267.

the Pazzi, as a pretext for the assassination. God had inspired them ; in spite of all risks success had so attended them that they were constrained to recognize divine intervention. Not a drop of blood except that of the accursed one and a *bargello* of like nature had been spilled. "We announce these things to Your Magnificence, because having been sorely offended, Your Lordship will surely rejoice thereat." They had had good reasons of their own for putting Girolamo to death, but foremost had been their love for Lorenzo, whose help and counsel they now entreated. The accursed brood of the Riario would soon be stamped out: they hoped to take one of the two fortresses on that day, and to soon oblige the other to surrender. Thanks to their patriotism, love and peace now prevailed at Forli. . . .

To this letter Lorenzo vouchsafed no response, merely telling the envoy who delivered it that he wished to live in peace for the short span that was yet allotted to him, and that no consideration in the world would induce him to dabble in such matters. Yet he still held the thread of the skein, and sent Stephen of Castrocaro to explore the humours of the assassins. Stefano, having, "according to orders received, spoken separately with each" (Ludovico and Checco Orsi), wrote that he could not describe the cordiality of his reception. "I therefore told them that Your Magnificence having sent me to the Lord of Faenza had requested me to confer with them also, and to assure them that Your Lordship was naturally disposed to do all that lies in your power in their favour and for their benefit." They prayed Lorenzo to induce the Pope to come to the help of the people of Forli, who were still horrified by the memory of the Count, and determined to no longer tolerate the rule of tyrants. Here follows the assassin's account of the assassination. The Orsi declared that at the sacking of the palace they had found no money, but jewels and plate to the value of 60,000 ducats; everything had passed through their hands, but they had kept nothing for themselves.

Checco's gravest assertion was that he had done the deed *conscio pontifice*. The cry of all was *Chiesa!* neither would

they hear of the Ordelaffi, "nor any other private Lord. . . . Come Milan, or any other potentate," they had continued, "we will be drawn and quartered, one by one, sooner than submit to a tyrant, for we have faith in the support of the Pope:" a transparent protest against the possibility of Forli being given to Franceschetto Cibo.[1] Stephen added that the Fort of Ravaldino, one of the finest he had seen, was ammunitioned for ten years. Having asked the Orsi what would be done with the Count's children, they replied that they were in a place where they would never be seen again, whence he concluded that they had killed them. The Orsi professed themselves well pleased that Madonna was in the fort, soon to fall into their hands.

Thus the Orsi, by suppressing facts and their real feelings, contrived to present a brave front to the envoy of Lorenzo Medici. Checco Orsi had concluded by saying that he "and all his house were the slaves of the Magnificent Lorenzo, and had I done nought else, should be content to have avenged that innocent blood of his brother;"[2] he had no other desire than "the certainty of Lorenzo's favour;" a few words in his writing would suffice him. In short he wanted a few strokes in black and white as well as words. But Stephen knew his master's humour too well to promise anything of the kind. "I replied, that without any other testimony, he could believe and I certify . . . ." He here remarked, in the current of his letter, that if possession were taken by the Church, Lorenzo would no longer be able to dispose of Forli as if it were his own, having previously assured the Orsi that "they need not fear that his master, who desired but to end his days in peace, would attempt to impose upon them the Lord Francesco Cibo as ruler."

And the Pope? Innocent VIII., ambitious but irresolute, had married his son to the daughter of Girolamo's deadliest enemy, and the envoys of the city, lately freed from the tyrant, had been graciously received at the Vatican. Yet, the Pope's lack of confidence in the appeal would tend to

[1] Son of Innocent VIII. and son-in-law to Lorenzo Medici.

[2] Giuliano Medici, killed in the conspiracy of the Pazzi.

prove that he had no hand in the assassination, and was besides most probably deterred by fear from coming to any decision, since Catherine had so promptly called the Lords of Bologna and Milan to her aid.

We learn from two letters of Giovanni Lanfredini, Florentine Orator in Rome, addressed to the *Otto di Pratica*,[1] that the Pope had written to Forli that Catherine and her children were to be protected and taken to the Fortress of Cesena, and that having assembled all the orators of the league he had caused a letter from the Governor of Cesena and one from the Commune of Forli to be read, which set forth that the citizens would no longer tolerate tyrants, that Pope Sixtus had deceived them, that the Count's rule had been detestable, and that they craved the protection of the Church. The Milanese Orator had enjoined on the Pope the protection of the widow and children, and the punishment of the assassins.

The Pope's instructions to his envoy at Milan betray the fears and indecision that consumed him. He sought to dissuade the Duke from sending forces for the defence of his sister, he wondered that the Duke could not entrust her defence to him, although he could not have done otherwise than accept the dominion offered by Forli to the Church. . . . What was nearest his heart was the peace of Italy, menaced as it was by the Turk.[2]

After this protest, seeing that matters did not shape themselves to his intentions, the Pope was deaf and blind to the affairs of Forli, which may have been due to the all-powerful influence of Cardinal Julian della Rovere.[3] The Cibo family were of too lymphatic a temperament to bend the Cardinal to their will or to enforce their authority on the whole *Curia*: they limited themselves to the accumulation of treasure, especially by usury. Unlike the Riario before, and the Borgia after them, they knew not how to extract profit for themselves from the political relation of the papacy with the affairs of the world in general.

[1] *State Archives of Florence*, Docs. 274, 275.
[2] *Secret Archives of the Vatican*, Instr. IV. Vol. 55, Doc. 283.
[3] A near relation of the Riario.

On April 18, a herald of Bentivoglio arrived at Forli, requiring, of the Council of Eight, the reinstatement of the Riario. He warned them to do no harm to the children of Catherine under penalty of reprisals from the Duke of Milan.

Savelli replied that there was nothing to fear for the children, especially if Catherine surrendered the fort: it would be impossible to reinstate her, because the city had offered itself spontaneously to the Pope, and had already dispatched orators to Rome. If the Countess surrendered, she might retire to her city of Imola. On returning to the square, the herald was met by Checco Orsi with words of insult for Bentivoglio and Bologna. These incidents caused some excitement in the city: Savelli, surrounded by his guard, appeared in the square, some voices cried *Chiesa! Chiesa!* but these demonstrations were due to bribery, and soon ceased. On the following day Savelli banished many suspects from Forli, sent for some partisans of the Orsi from Imola, and, to rid himself of the incumbrance of Catherine's mother and sister, summoned them to his presence, married Stella to her betrothed, Andrea Ricci, and sent them under honourable escort to Cesena.

Checco Orsi, hearing that many artisans had been admitted to the fort to share in Catherine's defence, went in fury to their houses, dragged forth their wives, and led them to the fort where he forced them to call on their husbands, saying, that unless they came out the Orsi would kill their children. One of these women imitated the device of the Countess. "Could I but speak alone to my dear husband, Bernardino," she said, "I am sure I could persuade him to return with me." No sooner had she entered the fort than she declared she would never leave it. At the same time, the men cried from within, that they had sworn allegiance to their lady, and that neither promises nor threats would induce them to abandon her.

On the morning of the 20th a courier from Bentivoglio arrived with a letter for Savelli from the Duke of Milan; towards evening another brought one for the council. Both

condemned the presence of the papal governor, and demanded the reinstatement of the Riario. The replies were kept secret. There was no sign of help from the Pope, and the most influential citizens were heard to say that His Holiness was not even cognizant of what had happened. To avoid a panic Savelli had recourse to the publication of two forged bulls purporting to have come from Rome, by which the Pope's thanks were conveyed to the people of Forli for having given themselves to him, promising them support.

On the 21st, the Duke of Milan's first envoy, accompanied by a trumpeter of Bentivoglio, entered Forli. They were on horseback, and when they arrived at the bridge known as Del Pane, close to the square, they were met by Checco Orsi and his followers, to whom their guide, instead of leading them to Savelli and the council, presented them. There, in the presence of the crowd, the envoy said, in a loud voice, that he had been sent by the Duke of Milan to request Orsi to bring to his presence the children of Girolamo. He must see them with his eyes. He added that Bentivoglio was at Castel Bolognese with his forces, and would soon be joined by those of the Duke.

"We have already put them to death," replied Checco; "we neither will nor can show them to you, and I tell you to begone quickly, lest we hang you by the throat. We neither fear Bentivoglio, nor the Duke of Milan. Within three days, the Pope will send us sufficient forces to send them back whence they came." The envoy replied that the rank of the prince he served sufficed to protect him against their insults, but Orsi, ordering his myrmidons to take the horses by the bridle, confined both horses and riders in a neighbouring inn. Towards evening, two men were captured who brought letters to Catherine from Bentivoglio and the leaders of the Milanese forces. The Orsi would have put them to death, but Savelli saved them.

On the following day an orator arrived from the Duke of Milan protesting against the detention of his envoy and the violation of the liberty of the people. The council apologized,

laid the blame on Orsi, and immediately liberated the envoy and his companion. Other things the orator said, but they were kept secret, and secret were the words that Ludovico Orsi had whispered in his ear.

Savelli, in the absence of news from head-quarters, continued to contribute forged bulls for the encouragement of the citizens: the Eight, who relied more on their artillery than on the Pope, dragged a *passavolante*[1] from the Fort of Schiavonia to a watchman's box that commanded the Valverde road and placed bombs in a house that stood near it, and on the 24th an edict of Savelli ordered both citizens and foreigners to bring in a bundle of wood for the barricades: the peasants brought two each, but none were willing to work at the barricades nor to guard the cannon. As a bait to the populace, the Orsi prevailed upon the council to provide each workman at the barricade with a ticket, in return for which they could demand a pawned article from any of the Jews. But the Orsi reserved to themselves the promulgation of this edict. On the 26th, the artillery of the Orsi opened fire on the Fort of Ravaldino, which suffered little and replied vigorously, damaging the palace tower in several places, but neither touching that of St. Mercurial nor of the Dome. There were only two victims, the Countess being minded rather to frighten than to injure the city.

On the 27th, one Battista of Savona, a relative of the late Count, and castellane of Forlimpopoli, actuated less by avarice than the conviction that Catherine's fortunes were fallen, gave up that fortress to Savelli for 4000 ducats: with his son and son-in-law as hostages while awaiting the payment of this sum.

On April 29, the ducal army which had joined the forces of Bentivoglio (about 12,000 strong without counting the adventurers and camp-followers) encamped at Cosina, five miles from Forli. It was led by Galeazzo Sanseverino, Count of Caiazzo, the future son-in-law to Ludovico il Moro and the

[1] Passavolante—an old Italian piece of artillery used, before the invention of gunpowder, to hurl stones and other minute projectiles.

Lords of Bergamo, Mantua and Bologna, who had determined in council to send Giovanni Landriani, an officer of mark, to treat with the citizens of Forli. He arrived there at the twenty-first hour and was received by the Council of Eight, of which Savelli was president. He eloquently denounced the murder of Count Girolamo, and pointed out the political illegality of the act whereby the city had given itself to the Pope, since Sixtus IV. had given the lordship thereof to Girolamo Riario and his heirs forever, until the extinction of his line. His widow and children were the representatives of his rights, which would be enforced by the 12,000 men, led by the Lord of Bologna and the generals of the Duke of Milan, brother of the Countess. Savelli had no right to accept the city on behalf of the Church and the league of the powers of Milan, Naples, Ferrara, Mantua and Bologna demanded the restoration of the Riario.

Savelli replied firmly that the Riario had forfeited their rights by non-payment of the dues of the Church, wherefore the city had been justified in giving itself to the Church, and the Eight, to whom he appealed, were unanimous in support of his argument, declaring with one voice that it was impossible to undo that which had been done. Ludovico Orsi imprudently added that Count Girolamo had but had his deserts and that he congratulated himself even more on having freed the city from such a tyrant than on having given it to the Church. . . . Within six days Ludovico Orsini, Count of Pitigliano with Ser Domenico Orio and the papal army, strengthened by the forces of Malatesta of Rimini, would disperse the troops of the Duke of Milan, and the people of Forli would be left at peace in their city.

"The dues of the Church, forsooth! The late Count was a creditor of the apostolic treasury for enormous sums," replied Landriani, after he had patiently listened to all that had been said. "If you hold to your decision," continued Landriani, "the Duke, my lord, proposes that the government of Forli be confided *pro tem.* to two commissioners, one on his own behalf, one for Holy Church, with the Pope as arbitrator. If he decides in favour of Forli I pledge my word as Ambassador

that the Captains and soldiers of Milan and Bologna will return whence they came, and not another word will be said of the Duke's demands, the murder of the Count, the imprisonment of the Countess and the rights of their children."

Savelli contemptuously refused, the councillors applauded. His reply and their applause were too much for the patience of Landriani, who cried that they would bitterly repent and that the Duke of Milan would hasten in person to avenge the wrongs of his nephews, sparing neither the possessions nor the lives of the people of Forli. He bowed and left the hall. He was met in the square by cries of "*Chiesa!* Long live the Church!" for a certain Guriolo (brother-in-law to Ludovico Orsi) had ridden in by the Cotogni Gate, crying, "Good news, good news! succour is at hand!" and the news that the Count of Pitigliano had arrived at Ronco so strengthened the determination of the Eight that the orator was recalled to hear once more that they would stand and fall by the Church.

The cries in the square may have been derisive, for, "I was in the square," says Cobelli, "when all the populace laughed, saying: 'This is really a hoax like the Ordelaffi used to treat us to!' 'O poor people of Forli,' cried a baggage-varlet, who was also in the square, 'the lords in the Milanese camp know better than that. No one cares to move a hand for us!' The truth was that everything was known in the Milanese camp. Many inhabitants of Forli, either fearing that their property at the Cosina was endangered, or in spite to their rivals, reported everything that occurred at Forli, at the camp at Cosina. Landriani, aware of the measures taken by the league to intercept help for Forli, could not believe that Pitigliano was at its gates.

"At last, from afar, a troop of horse became visible in a cloud of dust. . . . At the Cotogni Gate, instead of entering, they turned to the left and entered the fort. They were fifty horsemen sent by a cardinal who was related to Catherine, in her defence."

The leaders of the army hastened to communicate Savelli's reply to Catherine, proposing at the same time, with her

consent, to advance and sack the city. But Catherine, who was already in possession of the facts, ordered those captains to do nothing for the present but to approach the fortress by the hills in the neighbourhood of San Martino and Busecchio. It was impossible to move the whole army to the city on that day, but every company had marching orders and the whole camp was in movement, folding tents, packing luggage and burnishing arms.

Spies, of whom many hovered about the camp, ran to Forli with the news that the army was on the march to put the city to fire and blood during the night. A sudden, irresistible terror possessed the citizens: there was neither time nor intention, nor possibility of warding off the terrible blow; they could only weep and curse. The distracted populace paced the streets, calling those traitors and assassins of their country whom they had erstwhile exalted as liberators and by whom they had sworn to stand till death. Ludovico Orsi, Ronchi and Panzechi were wild with rage when they found themselves abandoned by the people and their partisans. Ludovico, less audacious than his brother, was seen by his familiars to weep. "Oh! had we but listened to the voice of the people, at first, and called 'Ordelaffi and St. Mark' (*i.e.* the Venetians who at that time colonized Ravenna) as they sent to tell us, we should not now find ourselves in this labyrinth. . . . We would have nought but Church and Pope, and a pretty Pope we have got! . . . I can remember the army of the Pope encamped outside Forli and yet unable to take it; and now that he could have had it without breaking a lance, he would have none of it. We have been gulled!" He was joined by Panzechi, with a few followers, and later by Ronchi; all were pale and bewildered. None dared to approach Checco Orsi; the enraged populace cast threatening looks at him, he kept silent and apart. "I saw how things were going," says Cobelli, "and said to certain friends: 'they are in bad case, they have neither tail nor wings left and cannot fly!' . . . I looked on for a while and then went to supper." A new and secret terror added to the discomfort of the Orsi. Catherine, who had means of learning whatever happened in the city, had, on

hearing the drift of their replies to Landriani, fired certain spiked bombs into the streets, on whose spikes were threaded placards that bore the following inscription:—"People of Forli! My people! Punish; put to death all my enemies! I promise to hold you ever after as my good brothers. Strike quickly and fear nothing. The Milanese army is at our gates; soon you will reap the reward and they the chastisement that are deserved." These projectiles carried the placards to every quarter of the town, where they were eagerly read by the populace; the assassins felt that their hour was come. Night was at hand, the army would enter with the dusk and surprise the city, they would be among the first to be taken. . . . What was to be done? Throw themselves at the feet of the captains, imploring pity? Too proud were the words they had spoken to their orator; there was no hope of pardon. Either they would be treacherously done to death by the citizens or beheaded in the square on the following morning as an example to the people.

It was not possible to save either the city, their property or their families: the utmost they could attempt was to save their lives. Unanimous on this subject they ceased from quarrelling and once more became friends, willing to forget all else if they might but escape.

Savelli did not fall so low: conscious of his rank, and mindful of his dignity, he refused to talk of flight.

While they were considering the course still open to them, one of them remembered that they still had control of the children of the Countess. "With those children in our hands, her 12,000 defenders may become useless to her . . . all is not yet lost!"

But they would be caught if they attempted to escape with six children and two nurses. Therefore, since they were constrained to fly the persecutions of the populace and the Duke's army, leaving behind them their families and property, they determined to adequately avenge themselves on Catherine, cause and origin of their ruin and despair, by slaying her children. If they could not complete the butchery at once,

they would drag them with them to be put to death at their leisure, or keep them as hostages for Catherine's submission to their threats. This is additional proof that the mother had not made light of the value of her children's lives by the reply attributed to her in the legend.

That night, at the second hour, Doctor Ludovico Orsi wended his way to the little fortress at the Gate of St. Peter. He was followed at a respectful distance by fifty armed men, lead by Giacomo Ronchi. Silently and cautiously they trod in the darkness and were soon hidden in the vicinity of the fort. Orsi called through the grating that he must see those in command at once. Capoferri, Serughi and Denti, accompanied by two soldiers, answered the summons and led Orsi into a room on the ground floor, close to the grating. "Brothers," said Orsi, "I come on behalf of Monsignore to demand of you the children of Madonna. To these children we must look for the salvation of our city, our lives and even the life of Monsignore. He will send them under proper escort to Cesena."

"Gaffer," replied Capoferri, "we are not going to give them up to you. I and my brother have travelled the world over long enough to see through your device. You have to fly and, like mad dogs, would fain set your teeth here and there. You shall not have the children to kill." His words were echoed by Denti and Serughi and all put their hands to their swords. Meanwhile Giacomo Ronchi had approached the grating, whence he saw and heard everything. He hastily summoned a handful of his men-at-arms and waited, intending to profit by the moment that the grating would open to give egress to Ludovic. Then he would enter with a rush, exterminate the guard and carry away the children.

He had thought it out fairly well, but did not succeed in sufficiently muffling his steps and those of his followers, which, despite the noise inside, were audible to the sentinel in the tower, who immediately apprised Capoferri of the *guet-apens*. Capoferri ordered Ronchi to depart at once, unless he and his people preferred to be put to death where they stood. Ronchi cried out that Catherine's children had been taken there by

Savelli and the Orsi, that Capoferri could not detain them against their will and that he would shatter the gate with a beam and seize the children. Tiles and stones then began to rain on Ronchi's men, and one of his servants was mortally wounded.

"I will ring the alarm-bell," replied Capoferri; "the people will come and tear you to pieces!" At this threat, Ronchi took to flight: the conspirators no longer dared to face the people. Ludovico Orsi was allowed to pass out, joined Savelli at the Fort of Schiavonia, and with him entered the square, where silence reigned and the terrified citizens awaited the plundering of the city, according to the orders of the Duke of Milan to his captains. This sacking (with Catherine's assent) was to the soldiers the aim and essence of victory, and they looked forward to it with avidity.

The Orsi went home and prepared for flight. They carried with them jewels, plate and gold snatched from the Jews and all they had been able to accumulate elsewhere; for knowing who had seized the most valuable of the Riario property, they had sent to demand it of the spoilers. Short had been their reign of terror, but while it lasted, none had withstood their demands. Ludovico and Checco, with two married sons, two cousins and a brother-in-law, gained the Cotogni Gate, where they were met by Ronchi and Panzechi and the kinsmen and partisans of the latter at two o'clock, after midnight. The fugitives were seventeen in number, and wishing to keep in touch with Forli, halted at Cervia, then held by Venice. But the Venetian podestà and captain, at Ravenna, refused to tolerate the presence of the murderers of Girolamo Riario, a senator and patrician of Venice.

The conspirators, on being ejected from Cervia, dispersed. In the deserted house at Forli, the old father and the unhappy wives of the Orsi were abandoned to their fate.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE RESTORATION

After the flight of the conspirators, "our town, which had been blind, was illuminated," says Bernardi. "None of the inhabitants had slept, the Milanese forces might have entered at any hour, people kept behind their well-closed doors." Among these was Leone Cobelli. But after the departure of the conspirators, Antonello, a follower of Panzechi, came to call him and told him of the flight of the Orsi, and that several citizens had gone to Ravaldino to tell the Countess that they were ready to assemble the people and give back the State to her and to Octavian by acclamation. A counter-revolution was at hand. Devoured by curiosity, Cobelli "hurried to the square," which was empty, then to the Custom House, where he found only the chief officer, Gian Griffone of Bologna, with two or three of his men. Then on to the Ponte de Cavalieri and the Canto dei Numai, where he saw many people of threatening aspect. . . . Alarmed, he joined his cousin, Guasparra de' Numai, and stood waiting, when there appeared Tommaso Palmeggiani and Ludovico Ercolani, followed by a troop, and upon their heels Tommaso degli Orcioli, returning from the fort.

At this sight Gian Griffone sprang into his saddle, and meeting the approaching company sternly queried of its leader, Thomas Palmeggiani, "Who are these people?" Palmeggiani, turning to the others, said, "Shall we kill this poltroon?" and then in reply, "We are the ill that God sends you." When he heard these words, Gian Griffone put

spurs to his horse and fled to the Ponte del Pane. And while he fled and his men dispersed, the crowd began to cry, *Duca! Duca! Octavian! Octavian!* and in a moment there was a revolution in favour of Catherine. All this happened in the night. Orcioli, accompanied by the others, returned to the house, where he wrote the terms of the transfer of the city and dispatched them to the camp at Cosina. From Casa Orcioli the revolutionists returned to the square, crying *Octavian! Octavian!* louder than ever. At every window lights appeared, and the great bell of the commune summoned the populace; a festive population invaded the square from every direction, and cheers and applause rent the air until they resounded in the fort, where Catherine, no longer a prisoner, was sovereign lady.

The exulting cries of the people were heard as far as Cosina, in the Milanese camp, but it is doubtful whether they were appreciated by the army, to whom orders had been issued for the sacking of the town in case opposition were offered to the restoration of the Riario. They were, however, forbidden to strike a blow without the consent of the Countess. Cobelli relates that Francesco Numai, Orcioli and other citizens had that night found the Countess so irritated with the populace that she was half inclined to allow the city to be sacked, yet feared that this course would increase the difficulty of recovering the property which the populace had pillaged from the palace, and being also, says Cobelli, "inspired to leniency by our blessed Saint Mercurial, and above all, mindful of the honour of women and maidens," decided that there should be no sacking. This, with the attendant horrors of fire and armed violence, had been looked upon as inevitable, when suddenly the rumour spread that "Madonna would have none of it," although the Milanese army was near enough to strike the first blow at dawn.

Catherine's decision, continues Cobelli, "saddened and astonished" some of the Milanese captains, causing others to curse and swear most horribly, for on the faith of being permitted to sack Forli, they had come away without a penny in their purses, and had kept their men together by dint of

"good words and fine promises." Troops were massed under the walls of Ravaldino, while the bulk of the infantry camped outside the Schiavonia, Cotogni and San Pietro Gates; but Catherine only permitted two companies to enter the city, so that Brambilla had no chance of playing the game of the Duke of Milan, which, it appears, would have been to seize Forli for himself. . . . "But he could not," says Cobelli, "for Madonna was too wise to admit many men-at-arms. O reader, observe! *Una ne pensa il ghiotto e l'altra il tavernaro.*"[1] Here the glutton would stand for the Duke and the innkeeper for Catherine. Catherine fully deserves the praise of Cobelli for defending her city against her defenders. Yet his satisfaction is a curious trait in one who had supped with the Orsi two nights earlier, and who on that very night had gone the round of the town with one of the assassins, to see its sights.

At dawn, when the first cries for Catherine were heard, one hastened to the house of the Orsi with the news that the people were crying, *Duca! Duca!* "Fly!" he said, "your sons have already fled." Poor old Orso, with his daughters-in-law and the daughters-in-law of his sons, taking with him what little he could, sought refuge in San Domenico. The monks declared that the old man hid himself in an empty grave, weeping, and crying, "Accursed children, whither have you brought me?" Among the seven unhappy women whom the Orsi had abandoned, was the widow of Agamemnon, who died of wounds received on the night of the Count's murder. She was left with two infants, one of whom was but six months old, whom she hid in the basket of a servant sent to Cesena, thus saving his life.

At sunrise on April 30, 1488, the *Signori* of the council (not the Eight appointed by the Orsi) and the magistracy waited on Catherine at Ravaldino to tender their allegiance. They were introduced into a hall in the fort, where she immediately appeared, dressed in deep mourning. "Her Ladyship," says Bernardi, "as ever, forgetful of evil and only

[1] The glutton is of one mind and the innkeeper of another.

mindful of good, gave hearty thanks to all," and permission to fetch Octavian from the Fort of St. Peter. But although he was to be carried in triumph, the captains of his guard would not consent to his going unless accompanied by Serughi and other men-at-arms. In this order, the magistracy led him three times round the square to the cheers of the populace, which continued along the road to Ravaldino. Catherine, who had set aside her garb of woe and was magnificently attired for the solemn reception of her first-born, clasped him to her breast, hiding her face and her emotion in this embrace, while the child, delivered from past terror, sobbed aloud in her arms. His mother comforted and pacified him. Feo and all who were present encouraged him until the boy dried his tears, again and again embracing his mother, spoke to them with childlike affection, and showed his joy at sight of the friendly face of Tommasino Feo; while, according to contemporary writers, tears were shed by those who witnessed the scene. Says Bernardi, "Discreet reader, I leave you to judge of the joy of that moment." The magistracy, with Catherine's consent, returned to St. Peter's for the other children, and an hour later there appeared five children with two nurses, so surrounded by the guards of Capoferri that they might have been taken for prisoners. The Countess, after warmly thanking him and the *Signori*, ordered bread and provisions in the largest possible quantities to be taken to the Church of the Pianta for the Milanese soldiers.

When Catherine was alone with her children, Capoferri and Serughi (who, while compelled to assume acquiescence with the Orsi, had been all along devoted to her cause) told her how, after the hostages had been brought back to them from under the walls of Ravaldino, they had sworn never to lose sight of them again until they could restore them unharmed to their mother; of the final attempt of the Orsi to snatch them from them, and of their own anxieties while they repulsed the conspirators with shot and stones. Each of them had a wife and children in the city, who might have been murdered by the baffled assassins. Yet had they been

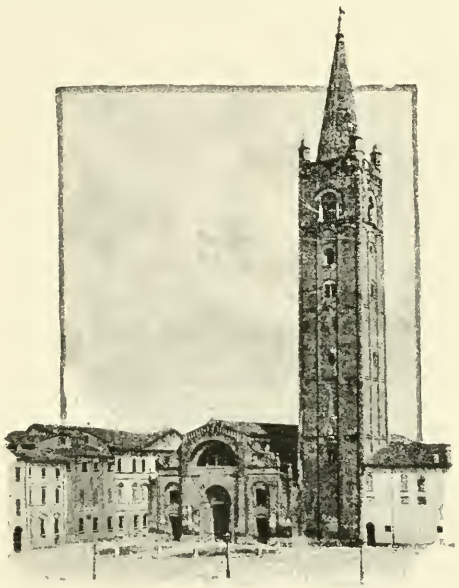
faithful to their trust, for which, says Vecchiazzani, "Catherine thanked them effusively, as if she had been mad for joy." She afterwards continued to load these tried friends with favours, which often consisted in the pardon of others, and nothing that she could do for them seemed to her enough.

On that day began the reign of Catherine Sforza, and in the state apparel in which she had welcomed her Octavian, seated in her massive arm-chair, she dictated her first commands to her secretary. She sent a courier to the Count of Caiazzo ordering him to immediately place his troops under the fort on the mountain side. She ordered Monsignor Savelli, papal governor, and the Counts Guido di Bagno and Pian di Meleto, papal generals, to be seized and imprisoned in the fort, and put a heavy ransom on the head of Zampeschi, who had jumped off the walls and fled. Savelli could not believe his ears at the sound of the people's cries, until some men-at-arms, with the words "Monsignore, you are a prisoner of Madonna the Countess," explained to him the untoward fact.

Catherine ordered Captain Rubino, who had been sent to her aid by a friendly cardinal, with fifty horse, to lead them to Forlimpopoli, of which she had already appointed him castellane, and of which he was to obtain possession by force or strategy. The former castellane, who had sold his trust for a bribe, was to be brought with his officers under strong escort to Forli. The houses of Andrea Orsi and Graziolo, his brother, were to be ruined and pillaged by the populace, and old Andrea and all the conspirators, whether male or female, wheresoever they might be found, taken and imprisoned in the fort. The families of Ronchi and Panzechi were to be imprisoned, and their houses, with those of Galasso, demolished. Catherine further ordered that the three who had thrown the corpse of Girolamo from the window be taken, as well as Pagliarino, who had brutally dragged it on the ground. Finally she ordered Gian Giffone, head of Savelli's guard, Pietro Albanese, Antonio da Modigliana, and many others of humble origin who had taken part in the assassination or revolution, to be taken and cast into prison.

Patrols were seen to leave Ravaldino, disperse within the city, and led by officers and spies, hunt for the culprits, invading the houses of those assassins who had escaped to drag their unhappy families in chains to the fort.

A second summons reached the army at Cosina before it had time to obey the first. Soon after, the troops were on the road to Forli, and the Captains waited on Catherine at the fort. Here they were met by Catherine, ready for her State entry. She desired two squadrons of Light Horse to precede and await her in the square in front of the palace, four companies of infantry to follow her, and the road between Ravaldino and the Cotogni Gate to be lined with troops. She ordered Bentivoglio and Rudolph of Mantua to surround the Parish della Pianta. When the army had been thus disposed of, she sprang into her saddle, with Sanseverino on her right and Brambilla on her left, followed by Landriani and Carlo Gratti, left the fort and rode in triumph towards the town.



THE CHURCH OF ST. MERCURIAL.

The victorious lady was splendidly attired, the helmets of the *condottieri* who rode at her side, the coats of mail of the men-at-arms, glittered in the sun. Catherine, content and at ease, rode between the troops that like two walls of steel lined the way, and who, forgetful that she had deprived them of the pillage, gloried in defending the heroic woman who had so well fought her own battle.

At the Cotogni Gate the cries and rejoicings began. The streets, windows and balconies were crowded with people, entranced at sight of the intrepid widow who had freed herself from the toils of her enemies and was more indomitable and formidable than ever. To fear and admire her was synonymous with the populace. The feast of St. Mercurial, patron of the city, fell on that day. Every year it had been the custom to celebrate it with public rejoicing, but it had never been before, nor was it after, so great a feast. The Milanese army was not only the strongest, but without comparison the most imposing of all Italy. Its burnished arms were famous, as were the gilded trappings of its powerful horses.

On the appearance of the Countess, the serried ranks of pikemen in front of the palace presented arms and stood at ease, and as Catherine passed through the thicket of lances, the standards were lowered in homage, while the bells rang out the signal for her to dismount and enter St. Mercurial. Here she heard the thanksgiving service for her and her children's deliverance. . . . *Pupillum et siduam auscipiet;* and, on leaving the church, caused Octavian, with the usual ceremonies, to be once more acclaimed Lord of Forli and the other paternal States. She gave Sanseverino permission to return to the camp, and requested the Provost Orcioli to remain on guard at the palace with all the troops that then stood there, so as not to permit a single soldier to move from his place. Accompanied by Brambilla and other captains, among whom were Landriani and Gratti, and escorted by two companies of infantry, she proceeded on foot to the Fort of Schiavonia, which had not yet surrendered. "And on the way," says Bernardi, "many of our women embraced her, condoling with her affliction," for a woman whose first exercise of power was for the protection of other women had not, till then, been seen among them.

Catherine halted at the Parish of the Trinity, sent Gratti to warn the castellane not to fire, and on his return continued her way to a house close to the fortress, whence she dispatched

Brambilla to demand surrender. The castellane replied that Monsignor Savelli had confided the fort to him, and that without an order from him he would not give it up.

"Monsignore is a prisoner of the Countess at Ravaldino."

"No matter; without his order I will not surrender the fort."

On being invited to send a person in whom he could confide to Savelli, he replied that he had no one, that all his property was situated at Cesena, a city of the Pope. If he surrendered, his possessions would be confiscated, his family impoverished, and himself branded as a traitor. He therefore craved the compassion of the Countess. Catherine, who wished to come to an arrangement that would not ruin the poor man, sent Gratti and Landriani to treat with him, and permitted them to visit Monsignor Savelli to save the castellane from the effects of the papal wrath. Alberico Denti, son of the castellane, left the fort, and on behalf of his father, offered the stronghold, by request of the magistracy, to the Countess. While Gratti, Landriani and Denti proceeded to Ravaldino to confer with Savelli, Catherine chatted confidentially with Brambilla, of whom she inquired why the army had not moved at her first summons. Brambilla told her that at that moment a great part of the cavalry had arrived from Castel San Pietro, so exhausted, that it would have been impossible for them to march, but that they would have come as soon as possible without needing a second summons. "Our chief," he said, "had decided, with God's will, to plant a May-tree (a palm) at the palace, on the site of the Count's murder on the first of May." This reply pleased the Countess, to whom a man-at-arms who had been in the service of the Count now said—"Madonna, the poor have sacked the cellar of the Orsi; its contents have been emptied and dispersed, with the exception of the largest barrels, which I have succeeded in saving for Your Ladyship; the Orsi have caused the dispersion of your whole cellar, and it is only fair that you should be somewhat compensated by theirs."

"I thank you for your thought and deed," said Catherine, "but let the poor enjoy the whole of that wine, for I will have

nought that has belonged to those people. I trust in God, that even if I leave the wine to the poor, He will not let me nor mine want for aught. The only loss to which I am sensible is that of my lord, who cannot be given back to me, of which I know the poor, of whom you speak, to be guiltless."

"Madonna!" exclaimed a knight, George of Tossignano, "I could neither speak nor act as you do. I have taken two loads of valuables from the wives of those assassins and *vivaddio!* I will restore nothing to them! I could make tunny-fish of them!"[1]

"That you will not do," replied the Countess, "for I wish well to women. . . . Not they have murdered my lord, but their traitorous husbands. And now that these women are in my hands, they shall suffer no injustice."

"Madonna, you speak like the wise woman that you are," said Brambilla, who encouraged her in her merciful intentions. "The murder of the Count," he added, "had been the work of miscreants, but if he had ever overtaxed his subjects, he (Brambilla) implored her to remove any pretext for discontent and earn their love."

Catherine thanked him, and replied that her sole aim was the welfare of the people, of which the placards sent into the town from Ravaldino bore witness; therein she had ordered that the guilty be put to death, and promised peace and security to the others. Catherine's words "much pleased Brambilla and all of us who were present," writes Bernardi. Provost Orcioli next approached the Countess to tell her that Bentivoglio was at the Gate of St. Peter, whence for excellent reasons he would not advance, yet having urgent need of speech with her, he begged her of her grace to go to meet him. Catherine mounted her horse and proceeded to the fortress at the gate, where she talked at length with Bentivoglio, who with Brambilla accompanied her on horseback to the house of Francesco Numai, where she was to dine. Numai had been the first to present himself at Ravaldino, the first to openly offer her allegiance after the nocturnal

[1] Bernardi.

flight of the Orsi; it was he who had initiated the happy change, and for this reason Catherine chose to enter his house before she crossed any other threshold in Forli. Bentivoglio would not stay, and returned to his soldiers. Madonna went to dinner, where she was joined by Gratti and Landriani, who had returned from their interview with Savelli. Their conversation was interrupted by the arrival of a squadron leader sent by Rubino from Forlimpopoli, who presented the castellane Battista in chains, with thirteen of his accomplices, to the Countess. The Countess ordered "each of them to be covered with a mantle in sign of shame, and handed over to Thomas Feo to be consigned to the dungeons."[1] Having assured herself of the possession of Forlimpopoli, she resumed her discussion of the surrender of Schiavonia, and concluded by leaving the matter to the judgment of Bentivoglio. Gratti, seeing that the populace, not content with pillaging the house of the Orsi, intended to raze it to the ground, ventured to insinuate that it was too great an ornament to the town to meet with such a fate. "Your Ladyship," he said, "might keep it for one of your sons, or for the reception of great personages, when they come to visit you at Forli. . . ." He was curtly interrupted by Brambilla, who declared that "Her Ladyship could not, in this matter, set aside the commands of the Duke of Milan, who on the moment of their leaving for Forli had enjoined on them to raze the houses of the traitors to the ground, in imperishable memory of his vengeance." The Countess at this began to jest,[2] saying in a very sweet voice to Gratti—"If it pleases you to stay at Forli, despite the orders of the Duke, my brother, I will take upon myself to avert the destruction of that house and will keep it for you, and for you I will even re-adorn it. . . ." Gratti, giving jest for jest, replied "that he would come willingly, not for covetousness of the fair house, but that the honour of living near Madonna would render a hovel acceptable to him." These courtesies were interrupted by a half-witted bricklayer, named Stradiotto, who was permitted to address persons of every rank on equal terms.

[1] Bernardi. [2] *Ibid.*

"Dear My Lady," he said boldly to Catherine, "I want you to entirely demolish that house, and not to listen to Messer Gratti, for it is an accursed house, at which I and other poor fellows have worked for a long time . . . and there are still five gold ducats due to me, and I don't know how to turn without them." In speaking he had seized the Countess by the hand, squeezing it violently, while he proceeded—"Give, O give me leave, Madonna, that I may put the first hand to the ruin of that house!" Madonna gave him leave; Stradiotto disappeared and ran until he reached the house of the Orsi. But for all his haste he was not the first: the whole house had been sacked. Stradiotto, not satisfied that the great door had been torn down, hammered at the tiles in which the hinges were set. . . . At last he succeeded in knocking one out, falling backwards with the rebound of the hammer, and his skull coming in contact with the opposite wall, he died of the shock in two days. His case provoked both hilarity and compassion. Francesco Sassatelli, with many other Imolese, offered the homage of her city to their lady in Casa Numai. She thanked them, "touched the hands of each," and assured them of her "affectionate benevolence." When dinner was over, Catherine, discussing the day's work with Francesco Numai, told him that she had never hesitated a moment to stop the sacking of the town, having always abhorred to let loose a licentious soldiery on defenceless citizens, and mounting her horse, she returned by the same road and with the same escort to Ravaldino. Here she summoned her chancellors and dictated various edicts, foremost among them being the decree by which, in obedience to her brother, the Duke of Milan, she appointed Brambilla governor of the city and commander of the troops that were stationed in the square, which she afterwards relegated to the suburb of Ravaldino.

On the same evening, before sunset, an edict was read in the square ordering those who, though banished by Count Girolamo, were still in the city, to leave it within three hours under penalty of the gallows. A second edict required all the superiors of charitable institutions (priests, monks, nuns,

chapels and confraternities) who had sheltered enemies, traitors, or stolen property, to immediately give up persons and chattels, under penalty of their Lady's displeasure. When this was done, Catherine applied herself to "her last and heaviest task." On learning that the battered corpse of her unhappy husband had not even been received by the canons of Santa Croce, and having been refused burial in the Dome, had been laid in unconsecrated ground near to a column in the outer portico; remembering the many benefits conferred by him on that church, where his arms had been placed in sign of gratitude, that on the Feast of St. Laurence, the day of his investiture, Girolamo had always made a handsome donation and had promised to remove the slaughter-houses and women of ill-repute from that neighbourhood, and to enlarge the Dome, Catherine was indignant "that the wicked men who are in the world" were capable of such ingratitude. "I put my trust," she said, "in the Courts of Heaven," where he (her husband) would be rewarded for the good he had done "and enter into blessedness."

She would not even be indebted to those canons for a burial-place, but that night had the body carried to the Church of St. Francis, where the coffin was deposited in the monks' choir in a "casket covered with black velvet." On the following morning, which was Monday, May 1, after stately obsequies, the body was buried in a large chapel of that church, under a monument in terra-cotta, surmounted by a fine baldaquin. But it only remained there three days, for the Commune of Imola claimed the body, reminding the Countess "that in case of future trouble, these people of Forli were capable of insulting Her Ladyship by unearthing the body and treating it as shamefully as before." So that on May 4 the body of the Count was taken to the ancient Dome at Imola and buried in the Riario chapel. This was destroyed at the end of the last century, when the Church of San Cassiano was erected. The stone with its Latin inscription, which had been placed there in 1558 by Giulio di Galeazzo Riario, nephew to Girolamo, was then incrusted over the

door of the sacristy. An error in the inscription places his death in 1487. Catherine, during the twelve years of her reign, never forgave those canons, who, in cowardly submission to the assassins, had repulsed the body of their benefactor, nor did she ever again set foot in the Dome of Forli.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### CATHERINE'S VENGEANCE

On May 1, an edict was hung up in the square, by which the Countess, under penalty of the gallows, demanded the restitution of everything that had been plundered from the palace. The citizens vied with each other in their zeal to be among the first inscribed as having made restitution, so that in a few hours Catherine had recovered everything except that which the conspirators had taken with them. This was not the most, but the best.

In the dungeons and damp vaults beneath the towers, under the feet of the Countess, radiant in her beauty and triumph, the guilty pined in chains, and, alas! with them their innocent families. Sometimes their cries could be heard in the halls above, to the annoyance of Catherine, the incarnate soul of mediæval rule, sentient, or choosing to be sentient, rather of power in the inexorable duty of retribution than of pity for the vanquished, who, on their side, neither expected mercy nor mitigation of their punishment. And, as torture and other penalties of the law were a different science to that of military slaughter, it became necessary to find a *bargello*, or captain of myrmidons, accomplished in this special art. A certain Matteo, surnamed Babone, arrived from Castel Bolognese, and to him was confided the execution of justice. "By Our Lady! O reader!" exclaims Cobelli, "to me he did not seem of Christian aspect, but a wild and horrible Turk."

The dungeons were full, yet they lacked one who could be less dispensed with than any other: old Orsi, father of the

assassins. The new *bargello* soon learned that he was hidden at San Domenico, where the monks neither dared, nor were able, to save him. Orso, "poor weeping mortal," was, with every species of insult, with a knotted rope round his neck, spat upon in the face and beaten, dragged to the citadel and finally imprisoned to await his execution. The next to be seized by Babone were Marco Scossacarri, Pagliarino, nephew of Ronchi, and Pietro Albanese. The others were sought for, but had fled. Then as Madonna was to dine with Francesco Numai, and the other traitors could not be captured, she said, "Let justice take its course." She ordered the Milanese troops to deploy in front of the palace of the podestà. The inexorable justice of the Countess became hourly more terrible to the populace. Babone brought the victims from the secret dungeons of the fort and led them one by one to the place of execution, where Cobelli was so much impressed with the impending horror that "he felt like one lost," yet has not spared posterity a single one of the sickening details that made his blood run cold.[1] "O reader," he says, finally, "certes, they who named that square the Lake of Blood, told no lie!"

On the morrow at dawn of May 2, the populace, summoned by an edict, crowded, bent on destruction, round Casa del Orso. Old Andrea had been dragged from the dungeons and with a "rope round his neck, unbuttoned, with only a red vest over his shirt; with one stocking on, and the other hanging in rags, his hands tied behind his back, he was pushed forward by the torturers, and repeatedly struck by Babone until he came in sight of the ruins of his palace. I followed," says Cobelli, "to see what they would do with him."

Four hundred of the rabble were pulling down the walls of Casa del Orso with beams, hooks, and pikes—"the green chamber, the beautiful dovecot, and the little garden room facing the orchard," had been pierced with holes in which bundles of wood were now set alight. They came down with

[1] See pages 289–292 of the original, vol. i. *Caterina Sforza, di Pier Dsiderio Pasolini.* Roma, Loescher.

a great crash, and Babone turning to Andrea said—"O Orso, do you see the arrangement of your palace?" And Orso, sighing deeply, cried—"O accursed children, to what have you brought me!" and then said no other word.

Twenty-six years later, in 1514, the *Monte di Pietà* arose on the site of those ruins, where it still stands. But to the populace, that spot was always known as *Il Guasto degli Orsi*.

The unhappy Andrea, who was eighty-five years old, of small stature, with a fine head, and whose hands on that morning trembled from agitation, was led to the window of the palace of the podestà, whence according to ancient custom he was made to admonish the populace to be wiser than he had been if they would escape his fate, and ask them to "say a pater-noster for his soul." But his voice was so weak and the balcony so high that the people could not hear his words, which were repeated by another. He was then led below, where Babone tied him to a plank by the feet and the middle, leaving his head hanging. The plank was tied to the tail of a horse that was driven three times round the square by hired ruffians. The horse was then caught, and the mangled and bleeding body dragged under the window of the podestà, where it underwent the same indignities as were practised on the delinquents of the previous day. "One of those dogs of soldiers tore the heart from the body, put his teeth to it, and having bitten it like a dog, threw it into the square." The fragments of the body were cast about the square and only collected seven hours later by a pitying hand and secretly buried in the cemetery of St. Mercurial. This execution left a pall of gloom upon the terrified city.

Babone pulled down more than two hundred houses, chiefly inhabited by artisans, in the suburb of Ravaldino, and caught and imprisoned ten other victims, whom he hanged from the battlements of the fort. It is not clear what were the powers of Babone, nor how many of these executions depended on the personal will of Catherine, but it is certain that by her express command, the women of the House of Orsi were treated with the utmost respect, and that the day of their father's dreadful execution, unhappy but unharmed, they

left the fort. The property of the Orsi was neither confiscated nor given away. The Countess had declared that she would have nothing that had belonged to them, and the populace had been limited to the destruction of their palace.

On May 3, the four leaders of the army of deliverance were invited to dine with the Countess in the citadel. The banquet was held in the "fourth hall, beginning from the door and going towards the fort." Ruined by time, and by the pacific work of a transforming civilization, rather than by wars, hidden by immemorial ivy, are the walls wherein Catherine sat at table with Galeazzo d'Aragona Sanseverino, Count of Caiazzo, Count Giovanni of Bergamo, surnamed Brambilla, Rudolph Gonzaga, Marquis of Mantua, and Giovanni Bentivoglio, Lord of Bologna, the flower of Italian chivalry. After dinner, the four Captains-general passed into another hall, and Catherine remained alone with her notary, Francesco Paladini. In obedience to an edict which bade all assemble at the eighteenth hour to receive the commands of Madonna, great numbers had already arrived, who were now called and presented in batches of twenty-five.

Catherine was seated in her great arm-chair, and before her stood a desk, on which stood a great parchment missal. The notary, as the citizens were called, informed them that they had been summoned on behalf of the Duke of Milan, to make oath of allegiance to Octavian their lord, and to Madonna Catherine, his mother, Regent of the State. He explained, in few words, the duties and advantages of good subjects, and the dangers and misfortunes which beset the disloyal. Then each passed before the Countess—ever silent and motionless in her throne-like chair—and placing their hands upon the missal, where the great initial painted in flowers and images symbolized the principle of the Gospel, made their oath of allegiance to her. Thus Madonna looked her subjects one by one in the face, and one by one she looked at those right hands that were to carry arms in her defence.

Then they were conducted slowly into the other hall, where these simple folk were amazed to find themselves thanked and

praised in the name of the Duke of Milan by the Lords of Caiazzo, Mantua, Bologna, and their new governor; great princes and famous captains, who, with the exquisite courtesy of their birth and time, deigned to assure them of Catherine's love for her people, and of the peace and happiness assured to them under her rule. In this direct and familiar form of government, every citizen felt himself close to his sovereign, who, although she might become formidable, yet by the power of an individual fascination, bound them to her person.

On the same day, a second edict decreed that all soldiers whose names had not been entered in the lists, should lay aside their uniforms, and leave the barracks, within three hours. Madonna, with a love of order and discipline that was inherited by her illustrious son, Giovanni delle Bande Nere, the first re-organizer of Italian forces, refused to recognize as soldiers any but those whose names had been regularly inscribed and thus legally enlisted.

On the following, which was Sunday, Catherine ordered a solemn procession from the Dome to the fort "in thanksgiving to God, to whom alone she owed her victory." Towards evening the Countess, accompanied by the four Captains-general, went to the square, where, in presence of the assembled people, the ceremonial of taking possession was repeated.

After this act Catherine wished that there should be peace among her people. Arms might no longer be carried, under penalty of ten lire and three strokes of the whip, nor might they walk abroad in the city after the great bell had rung, with or without light. She made public that, henceforward, no more inquiries would be held, nor would she listen to spies, nor did she care to know what this or the other may have said in the terrible days that were past.

Yet the affairs of the recent disturbances were not all settled. Monsignor Savelli and the papal generals were still imprisoned in the fort, where they had learned the cruel fate of Andrea Orsi, and trembled for their own. But

Catherine was not forgetful that Savelli had confided her children to those loyal gentlemen who had saved their lives. By means of Bentivoglio, an exchange was arranged with those prisoners who had been sent to Cesena from Forli, and Monsignore and his two companions left the fort, with all their possessions, on the day of the return of the hostages.

Neither could she forget the assassins who had fled, for each of whom, living or dead, she offered a prize of 1000 gold ducats, the restitution of any loss sustained through the death of the Count and the real and landed estate of the criminal who might be consigned to her, with the promise of office or pension for the rest of the captor's life.

Catherine deemed the departure of the Milanese army a good opportunity for sending into exile the remaining guilty or suspected persons. Of the eight who had governed the city during her imprisonment, four, Simon Fiorini, Nicolò Panzechi or Pansecco, Antonio Montese, and Guido Orselli (the latter with a son), were condemned to perpetual confinement in Milan, after they had been confronted with the Countess, and listened to the expressions of her indignation, in public audience, from her own lips. Their property was sequestered, their houses turned into barracks, and themselves sent under strong escort to Milan.

On May 7, the ducal army departed for Milan, and with it Octavian, whose mother wished the young Lord of Imola to enter that city under the auspices of the four famous captains.

Although the Countess had repeatedly said that she would have no more to do with the spies, nor suspicion, nor condemnations, such things still obtained, possibly against her will. Two other accomplices of Ronchi were sentenced by the podestà, another heavily fined, and another imprisoned, while a measure that concerned two eminent citizens occasioned unfavourable comment. Catherine's gratitude to Capoferri, Serughi and Denti, who had saved her children, and to Ercolani, who had been instrumental in admitting her into the fort, had been proved on every available occasion since her accession. Those members of the Council of Eight who

had remained at Forli unmolested, when their colleagues were banished, owed their liberty and other immunities, like many other citizens, to the all-powerful intercession of Capoferri and Serughi. But certain envious and malignant persons never ceased from reminding the Countess that, after all, Serughi was a son of a daughter of Andrea Orsi and that Ercolani was brother-in-law to Matteo Galasso, for whose capture, alive or dead, she had offered 1000 ducats; also that "blood will boil without fire." At last she was induced, under pretext of providing Octavian with faithful counsellors, to banish Serughi and Ercolani to Imola, where, accompanied by some of their relations, they established themselves. Catherine had later cause to bitterly regret a measure which deprived her of these faithful friends.

Meanwhile, the allied cardinals who had already befriended the Riario, sent the youngest representative of their order, Cardinal Raphael, to congratulate his aunt, and to offer her moral support. He arrived on May 21 at the Forlimpopoli, where he was met by Catherine, accompanied by many nobles, with whom he returned to Forli. On July 19 he was present at the legal nomination of Catherine as guardian to her children; three days later he went to Imola, where he abolished certain usages that were more obnoxious to the people than useful to the prince, and lowered the scale of rent and taxation. While his lavish expenditure, his frequent appearance in public, his *largesse* and his cavalcades endeared the government of Octavian to the people of Imola, the other cardinals related to Catherine obtained from Innocent VIII. (who had been so adverse to her), the investiture of the States for Octavian and his heirs. Catherine celebrated the happy event "with the solemnities of bells and fire," (illuminations) on July 13. She would willingly have associated this investiture with an act of generosity, yet did nothing at the time, lest it be ascribed to Cardinal Raphael, who was already so popular. But no sooner had he departed for Rome (October 19) than she summoned the council and declared her desire to lighten the taxes of her subjects. An edict was immediately "cried" which lessened them by one-

third, and the council, not to be outdone, renounced part of their ancient right to a share in the wheat-tax.

Early in June Brambilla, who had remained at Forli as governor of the city, perished in a fray at Faenza, whither Catherine sent him, with the flower of her troops, to the relief of the widow and infant heir of Galeotto Manfredi, its murdered lord.[1] In December of the same year she lost another friend in Francesco Sassatelli, murdered on his return to Imola after visiting Catherine at Forli, to confer with her on her own affairs. Neither the perpetrators nor the cause of this crime were ever discovered. Catherine, in the time that intervened between these two deaths, had been warned anonymously that, unless she beheaded or banished every member of the families of Marino Orzioli and Bartolomeo Marcobelli, there would be no peace for her nor her subjects. But the Countess had seized that occasion to make a final and official declaration that the time of suspicion and punishment, of which she was so weary, was over. She expressed her contempt for anonymous calumnies, and added, that her only thought henceforward was to console her people and lighten their burdens. In which she was more generous than prudent.

[1] Francesca Manfredi had been, under strong provocation, an accomplice in the murder of her husband, but she was a daughter of Bentivoglio, one of Catherine's deliverers, and therefore entitled to her support.

# BOOK V

## A CLANDESTINE MARRIAGE

# CHAPTER XIX

## THE CASTELLANE OF RAVALDINO

TOWARDS the summer of 1488 a rumour gained credence that Catherine was about to marry Antonio Maria degli Ordelaffi, a young, brave, and handsome gentleman who lived in obscurity at Ravenna, on a subsidy of three hundred ducats that were paid to him by the Signory of Venice. This marriage would have strengthened the position of the former and present lords of Forli by uniting the two houses, without injury to the little Riario. Had not Catherine Imola to bestow on them?

The hope of this alliance formed the staple of conversation in all the inns and market-places of Forli. Heavy wagers were staked, liveries and outfits ordered, and sticks were painted with the combined arms of the Riario and Ordelaffi. Several persons even went to Ravenna to offer congratulations to Ordelaffi, who received them with enthusiasm. On the 22nd of the preceding April, Antonio Maria had already written the Duke of Ferrara that he "had heard that the Countess had a mind to choose him for her husband, so that he might avenge her wrongs and his," and that he had even written her two letters suggesting this course. He had not entrusted these letters to messengers, but had tied them to arrows that had been shot into the fort. He concluded "with tears in his eyes" by entreating the Duke to keep his secret.

These rumours exasperated Catherine, who caused the most persistent of their disseminators to be imprisoned. One

offender was only released from the fort on payment of a heavy fine, to another four strokes of the whip were administered in the square. To the fort went also that Leone Cobelli, whom we have chosen as our faithful guide, because, as he has often told us, he went abroad on purpose to see and write of all that happened at Forli. Cobelli, who, besides being a musician and historian, was a teacher of dancing and painting, had recently painted many sticks, escutcheons, arms and other objects, the arms of the Riario being quartered thereon with those of Ordelaffi. Catherine would have kept him in the fort but for the intercession of Thomas Feo, to whom, at length, he owed his liberty and the privilege of returning to his old haunts. Cobelli, incensed by his imprisonment, would have burned his chronicles, and thus consigned to ashes the praise he had lavished on his cruel lady. From this he was prevented by friends, but the episode turned her admiring historian into an adverse critic.

On the demand of Catherine, and on information of the annoyance to which she had been subjected, the Venetian Senate banished Ordelaffi to Friuli, where he lived for ten years, until they sent him back to Ravenna, in 1498, to harass the Countess and prevent her from sending help to the Florentines in their war with Pisa. She had, however, herself given rise to the rumours of which she so bitterly complained. Ordelaffi had ever been the enemy of her house; in his name conspiracies had been hatched and blood had flown; with him had originated the conspiracy of the Roffi, which had been punished by her earliest sentences. Yet Ordelaffi had paid long visits to Catherine, and had even been her guest at the Giardino, a villa she possessed near to Imola.

Thither went Catherine in October of that year to superintend the building of her new sanctuary of the Piratello. She was preceded by her children, who were received with the honours due to their rank by Giovan Andrea of Savona, castellane of the fortress. When, a few days later, the Countess crossed the city and halted at the Rocca, the castellane refused to admit her. Catherine threatened and insisted in vain, the draw-bridge was not lowered nor the door opened.

At last she was permitted to enter, but with only five or six of her suite. Faithful to the memory of Count Girolamo, the rumour of her intrigue with Ordelaffi had aroused the indignation of this castellane who believed her to be capable of handing over the fort to Ordelaffi.

Catherine, smarting under the humiliation she had endured in the presence of the whole population of her own city, sent a courier to summon her nephew, Cardinal Raphael, from Rome. On his arrival, seven days later, the castellane submitted to Catherine, who established her right to the fortress. Accompanied by the cardinal and her children she went in state to the Piratello, but according to ancient popular tradition she and her maids of honour were barefoot.

On February 1, 1490, the magistracy complained to Catherine that, since the exile of the Jews, money was not obtainable on any security; immediate steps were therefore necessary. Catherine praised their zeal and sympathized with their embarrassment; then with an air of virginal candour, repeated to them, word for word, the objections they had raised when she and Girolamo had suggested the erection of a *Monte di Pietà*. The Countess, when she had sufficiently diverted herself with the confusion of the members of council, who, to their mortification, recognized their own words in her discourse, changed her tone and consented to the admission of eight citizens to the council who were experienced in such matters. In the name of the Countess and the council, a rich Jew of Bologna was invited to Forli, where, the council having given security for his capital, he accordingly established himself.

Hearing that much blood had been shed at Imola, Catherine sent eighty Light Horse to the governor, Guglielmo dal Todesco, who enforced peace among the families of Tartagni, Calderini and Vaini, and maintained it by the exile of one Giulio Mercati, who had begun the feud by wounding a Tartagni.

Thomas Feo had so ably defended Ravaldino that he began to look upon the fort as his own, while Catherine "wished to

be free to nominate or dismiss her castellane." She had never yet succeeded in ridding herself of any of them. In the case of Thomas Feo, the difficulty was increased by his relationship and personal merit. She therefore gave him her half-sister Bianca to wife, with a dowry of 15,000 gold ducats, in the hope that a young wife, bred in pleasure and luxury, would induce him to leave of his own accord, sooner than condemn her to a seclusion that was almost imprisonment. For a castellane could never leave his post.

But Tommaso, obstinate as ever, stayed in the fort, and as before, was lord and master therein. Evil tongues averred that Catherine's efforts and the castellane's obstinacy might be ascribed to a love-affair between the Countess and his younger and handsomer brother Giacomo, whom she wished to install in his place. It was added that she had already married him in secret, lest she should lose the guardianship of her children and the regency of the State. The relations of the castellane to his Lady were apparently unchanged. One morning the Countess, accompanied by Octavian and Giacomo, entered the fort, and leading Tommaso away from the others, she invited him to inspect with her the new gardens she was laying out towards Bertinoro. They walked together for a long time, and Catherine's words became ever kinder, while with sweet voice and look she held the bewildered castellane spell-bound. It was about the fourteenth hour, and the heat was intense. They sought the shade of a fig-tree and ate some of its fruit. Tommaso's eyes were riveted to the face of his beautiful sister-in-law.

When Catherine felt assured that he would follow and obey her, she graciously asked the castellane to lend her his arm to her chamber, which at that time was situated outside the fort. The castellane was taken by surprise, he became taciturn, hesitated . . . and refused. But Catherine's entreaties were so flattering, she moved forward, yet cast a glance behind her, that Feo followed in her steps. They crossed the whole length of the gardens, and then climbed a winding stair that led to Catherine's apartment, she in front, and Feo following in her steps.

No sooner had his foot crossed the threshold of the ante-room than two iron-gloved hands seized and held him. The voice

of Giovanni Ghetti, captain of the great tower by the gate, said—"You are the prisoner of Madonna the Countess; fear no harm." With these words he was deprived of his sword. The desperate cries of Feo brought a servant,—who had followed him,—and who afterwards narrated what he had seen in the garden, to his rescue. When his master was imprisoned, he ran to the fort, swam across the moat, where a friend gave him a hand, and both climbed up to the loaded cannon and pointed them towards Catherine's window, in the belief that she was murdering Feo. A ball passed over her head without even causing her to start. Tommaso was placed under strict guard in the tower by the gate.

Catherine then summoned Giacomo, informed him of what had happened (which he knew), and offered him his brother's post. Giacomo was seen to blush (for which he had good reason),and heard to refuse, but none of those present believed in his sincerity. He enlarged on the loyalty with which his father and uncle had served the Riario; if a taint of treachery were discovered in Tommaso, he could no longer look his Lady in the face.

The Countess reassured him; she meant no harm to Tommaso, but circumstances obliged her to change castellanes. Giacomo at last consented, on condition that his brother should depart unmolested and in honour, "so that none might speak lightly of him, in the fort or in the town." Catherine provided him with a guard of honour of forty Horse as far as Bologna, whence he and his young wife proceeded to Savona. Catherine soon recalled them to Forli; later she appointed Thomas Feo Governor of Imola, where his gentle wife died and was buried in 1496, mourned by the people to whom she was known as the "Mother of Orphans." Catherine wrote her own version of the dismissal of Tommaso to the Dukes of Ferrara and Milan; the latter sent an envoy to Catherine with congratulations and an order of knighthood for Giacomo Feo.

Catherine's joy in the honours and elevation of her favourite confirmed the rumour that she was secretly married to him. Cobelli relates that a son was born to them on whom

Catherine conferred knighthood. "There was murmuring in the city" which reached the ears of Madonna, who sent for a poor old man named Maestro Sante di Sole, and asked him how he dared to spread the report "that this child of Messer Iacomo Feo is my child?" This the poor man denied, but Cobelli accuses Catherine of "finding a false witness," to whose testimony Maestro Sante owed a whipping of which he died. "And many were hanged for the same cause." Cobelli, who was now Catherine's enemy, is more trustworthy when he describes Giacomo Feo—

"Many and many a time have I seen this Iacomo, brother



THE MIRACLE OF THE FOWLS.

*Fresco in the Church of San Girolamo at Forli. Among the figures are represented Catherine, her husband, her son Ottavio, and Giacomo Feo.*

to Messer Tommasino, come to the palace of Count Girolamo; since the death of the count I have seen him in the fort . . . soberly attired and wearing a black cloak and unattended he went about Forli. He was a youth of twenty years or little more, fair, beautiful, and good to look upon. Now when Fortune beckoned him, he followed, and Madonna made a knight of him—Captain of all her men-at-arms, viceregent of Forli and Imola, so that he may make or mar as if he were indeed lord. And now when he rides abroad, it is with a goodly company a hundred strong, armed with

partisans, lances and pikes. . . . Truly, Fortune has exalted him into the heaven of Venus and Mars. . . . There be those who say that Madonna has committed an enormity in taking her poor servant for a husband. Now I reply for Madonna," adds the sly chronicler, "'*Non a bello quelle che e bello, e bello quello che piace:*'[1] and I say that when Madonna saw Messer Iacomo Feo, young, handsome, virtuous, wise, honest, and apt for her service, she loved him."

When the castellane of Imola heard what had befallen Tomasso Feo, he resigned his post, lest he too should fall into Catherine's nets, and left her States. Catherine replaced him by Giampietro Landriani, the husband of her mother Lucretia, and gave the place he had vacated at Forlimpopoli to Pietro Landriani, his son, and her half-brother.

The power and favour of Giacomo Feo soon became a source of envy and danger. He resigned his post at Ravaldino to his uncle Cesar Feo, and on September 2 accompanied the Countess as Commander-in-Chief of her forces and fortresses, to Imola, and would have followed her to Tossignano but that Catherine's coachman was killed in the night during a quarrel with a groom, so that she did not go there.

The Tartagni and Vaini, with other citizens of Imola, had meanwhile conspired at Tossignano to demand of Catherine the surrender of that fortress. If the Countess refused to surrender, she and Feo were to be put to death. The conspirators were taken and confessed that, having heard of dissension between Catherine and Octavian, they had determined to imprison the Countess and put Feo to death lest Octavian, their rightful lord, be deprived of his own. The castellane of Tossignano and others were unanimous in declaring that they had intended to protect the rights of Octavian against the favourite of his mother.

The houses of the Vaini and Tartagni were razed to the ground, and the conspirators imprisoned in the dungeons of Ravaldino. Two sons of the Tartagni were sent to the same fortress as hostages. The podestà of Imola was summoned to Forli to repeat their indictment, which, after the proceed-

[1] That which is beautiful is less beautiful than that which pleases.

ings had lasted ten days, resulted in sentence of death. Catherine, however, who did not choose that the severity of this punishment should be construed into fear and lend importance to a petty conspiracy, commuted the sentence into detainment at her pleasure in the fort. Enea Vaini had succeeded in escaping to Massa Lombarda, but Catherine never rested until he was caught and confined with the others at Ravaldino, whence all were liberated some three years later. The moment seemed, to Antonio Ordelaffi, opportune for an attempt to regain his ancestral dominions. But with his usual want of forethought, he omitted to murder a certain castellane. One of his agents named Salumbrini was hanged at the Fort of Schiavonia and a man named Montanari was led out to execution in the square and there set free.

The condition of the city and territory of Forli was not prosperous. Although the land-tax due from the peasantry to the council had been lowered, the peasants continued to sell or make mock sales of their property to the citizens to avoid paying it. Hence a diminution in the public funds and the necessity of new taxes.

Catherine, who remembered that with the complaints of the peasantry had begun the downfall of Count Girolamo, made personal inquiries and summoned the council to her aid. On December 28, 1491, she published an edict which rendered illegal any sale of peasant property at the request of citizen creditors, but should such sale be suggested to the manifest advantage of the proprietor, her sanction would be needed to legalize it. The burden of the tax would remain attached to the property, and would pass from vendor to buyer. On learning that several peasants had been obliged to sell their possessions to defray their debt to the Treasury, and that many artisans had sold their working utensils to escape from judicial exaction, she published a second edict whereby all her debtors, whether in the city or among the rural population, were summoned to appear before her auditor. According to the nature of the debt, and especially according to the condition of the debtor, they were granted time, abatement, or complete remission.

# CHAPTER XX

## CHARLES VIII. IN ITALY

Pope Innocent VIII. died on July 25, 1492, and the elevation of Cardinal Rodrigo Borgia to the Papal See, under the name of Alexander VI., was announced in August. This event was celebrated in Catherine's States by three days' illuminations and thanksgiving services in all the churches. Cardinal Borgia had been vice-chancellor to Sixtus IV., and a frequent guest at her house in Rome; he was, besides, godfather to her eldest son. The new Pope graciously received Catherine's envoys, assuring them that he would be a father to Octavian, and that Catherine might rely on him as she had done on her uncle Sixtus. He granted to the people of Forli a three years' jubilee.

The handsome person, fine manners and personal fascination of Alexander VI. have been described by Gasparo da Verona, Porzio, and others. The Milanese writer, Del Maino, praises the "noble aspect, serene brow, regal expression, the countenance in which were blended majesty and liberality, the genial and heroic composure" of this Pontiff, who was in reality both mean and prodigal, frugal and dissolute. Among his four sons was the ambitious Cæsar, soon to become his master and master of the Church.

Cardinal Ascanio Sforza, brother to Ludovico il Moro, all-powerful at the Court of Rome because of his co-operation in the election of Alexander VI., used his influence with the latter to alienate him from King Ferdinand of Naples, and, unknown to the Florentines, to draw him into a league

with the Duke of Milan and the Venetians. In May, small detachments of Lombard troops passed through Romagna. "They cannot do any harm," wrote the Florentine commissioner at Faenza to Piero de' Medici, "for between Faenza and Cesena is the State of Forli, the Madonna whereof keeps most vigilant guard . . . not permitting a single man of them to enter Forli. Should such an one enter, none may house him without forfeiting his head." He added that Ravaldino was amply provisioned with wheat, wine and wood, and rendered all but impregnable by recent changes in its fortifications. It was common talk that if Ludovico il Moro did not intend to occupy the State he would find means to remove "that Messer Iacopo (Giacomo Feo) who governs it." . . . At Imola they guarded the square by night, and fear prevailed everywhere, "for none knew what support Madonna could count upon . . . who, if she be not upheld by Florence, doth stand alone, and is therefore in great danger."

Henceforward the history of Catherine becomes ever more one with that of Italy, or rather with that of Europe. Everything conspired to summon Charles VIII. to Italy, and especially to Naples. His desire to supplant the House of Aragon by that of Orleans, the exhortations of Alexander VI., transmitted to him by Cardinal Julian della Rovere, and, above all, the prayers of Ludovico il Moro, who, despite the threats of the Court of Naples, still persisted in governing for his nephew, the Duke of Milan (who had wedded Isabel of Aragon). He therefore resolved on an expedition by sea and land. King Ferdinand prepared his defences, and sought the alliance of the Powers of Italy; he sent orators to Catherine who refused to bind or compromise herself; the Pope and the Florentines, less circumspect, did not hesitate to throw in their lot with the King of Naples.

In June, the Duke of Milan (or rather Ludovico, who governed for him) wrote requesting Catherine not to ally herself with Naples, but with Charles VIII., who was about to invade Italy with great forces by sea and land. Catherine

replied that she did not deny an interchange of courtesies with the King of Naples; "having been for months and months without help in the world." This must be ascribed to her isolation, "not to any desire to offend Your Excellency, to whose advice I ever bow."

Both the French and Neapolitan generals had received instructions not to advance until Catherine had declared herself for one side or another. Bernardi writes that all one day "the ambassadors of the opposing Powers stayed with Her Ladyship, praying her that she would ally herself with them." But it had been impossible for either of them to extract from her a promise, a word, or a sign.

Cardinal Raphael Riario, being sent by the Pope to prepare quarters for the troops, arrived at Forlimpopoli. The Countess went to meet him with Octavian, Giacomo Feo, and a company of nobles. She refused to yield to his persuasions to ally herself with Naples, declaring that, for the present, she must remain neutral, but promising to inform him of any change in her policy before acting upon it. With this reply he was obliged to return to Rome, while an envoy returned to Forli who had already been despatched by Catherine to Florence to announce the state of affairs in Romagna, and to keep her informed of the strength of the French and the intentions of the Florentines, to whom she had also declared her neutrality.

On the return of this envoy, the Countess displayed a feverish energy. An edict commanded the rural population to take steps to insure their own safety, as French and Neapolitan troops might any day invade the country. The mercenaries of France encamped at Bologna were chiefly Italians under the command of the brothers Sanseverino. These left Bologna for Cotignola. Catherine then fortified the castles of Imola, Mordano and Bubano, sending thither her most experienced soldiers from Forli and Forlimpopoli, and recruited as many others as she could. The ambassadors of Naples and Milan again tried to win her favour for their respective masters, but were courteously dismissed by Catherine, who secretly summoned her councillors, and with them decided

on continued neutrality so long as that should be possible. If obliged to ally herself with any one, she would decide for the King of Naples, who was unjustly attacked.

On September 4, the Neapolitan ambassador returned to Forli, while the Count of Caiazzo (Sanseverino) sent his envoy to persuade the Countess to side with the French. Catherine resolutely maintained her neutrality, and "Misser Francesco del Quartieri," like his Neapolitan rival, "departed where God listed, with his trumpets in his bag." . . . Small was the State of Catherine, and meagre its resources, but the lustre of her name was such that each party felt her alliance would infuse new strength.

At last Giacomo Feo was empowered to inform the Neapolitan ambassador that Catherine espoused his cause and the Pope's. The ambassador had been instructed to accede to any proposition of the Countess. He informed Feo that on the following morning the Neapolitan army would occupy Villafranca. Feo returned with the conditions signed; the Countess dismissed the French envoys, and sent Giacomo Feo to complete the armaments of Imola, Tossignano and Mordano. Rome, Naples and Florence agreed to contribute 16,000 ducats towards these expenses. Pope Alexander characteristically demurred to paying more than a quarter of this sum, saying that "if he had consented to pay a third it had not been in spirit, but in words."[1]

On September 18, Giacomo Feo, having completely fortified the territory of Imola, returned to Forli, where he was appointed Governor-general and Vice-regent of the State, returning on the following day with Octavian, on horseback, to Imola. On the 23rd, Dovizi, surnamed Bibbiena (author of the *Calandra*), wrote Piero de' Medici that "to-day occurred the meeting of My Lord Duke (of Calabria) with the divine Madonna of Forli, and I need not tell you that His Excellency was point device and sumptuously habited in the Neapolitan fashion. She came to meet him an arrow's throw

[1] Letter of Puccio Pucci, dated Rome, August 23, 1494, to Piero Medici, Arch. Med. a. Fr. Filza XVIII.

from Bagnara, where they were to dine. They were together two hours at Bagnara, but *videntibus omnibus*, for Pheo will keep her for himself. His Excellency returned well pleased. He does not care much for the face, . . . yet the rogue told me there had been warm hand-clasps and much flashing of eyes. . . ."

The Countess, accompanied by a single maid of honour, had proceeded to Imola, whence she despatched Thomas Feo as governor to Forli, pending more peaceful times. She then came to an unexpected decision. The French had taken the little Castle of Mordano, put its heroic garrison to the sword, and ill-treated the villagers without regard to age or sex. Catherine, nothing doubting, on hearing of their approach, had sent word to the Duke of Calabria to hasten to the succour of the two hundred brave men who were fighting his cause. But the Duke, who but a week earlier had valorously attacked the French when they were in small numbers, and had eluded him, was deaf to this appeal now that they were 14,000 strong, although the battle lasted fifteen hours, and he was near at hand.

Catherine, betrayed and abandoned, cursed the hour when she had joined hands with the enemies of the House of Sforza. Three fine letters from her to Alfonso of Calabria, Piero dei Medici, and the Marquis of Mantua announce her change of policy and allies. She had done her duty, and more, "but what had been her reward?" And over the smoking and blood-stained ruins of Mordano she swore to leave the treacherous and cowardly allies who had deserted her.

The Duke of Calabria left Faenza under a dripping rain, and retired on Cesena. The Countess, on joining the French, had stipulated that he should be allowed to pass through Forli unmolested. But Alfonso, distrustful and chagrined by Catherine's defection, went round by the hills, devastating the country, where he only met with those rebellious peasants who had disobeyed Catherine's edict. On the following day he liberated his prisoners, and, still under a heavy downpour, led his tired and drenched troops forward on their disastrous march.

While the troops of the Duke of Calabria had been distinguished for their discipline and general good conduct, the behaviour of the French army was deplorable. To avoid bloodshed the Governor of Forli closed the gates of Forli to them; but the French reappeared at the gate of Schiavonia, and threatened to scale the walls. The shopkeepers fled in terror, losing their money and their goods, while one citizen was wounded and another killed in the confusion. On the following days the French ravaged the country round Forli and Ravenna, burning, maiming, sacking the houses of the poor, whose stolen bedclothes and furniture they sold in the city for the price of rubbish. Catherine wrote to the Governor, requesting him to forbid citizens to buy anything of the soldiers, and commanded that persons who had suffered loss, or who knew of these thefts, should appear before the Governor to denounce them. The Governor read a letter[1] to the Ancients, in which the Countess deplored the persecutions "of these French, who, albeit our friends, are bestial and lawless, having no respect for their superiors. These I know disapprove of their conduct, yet are powerless to hinder it. Wherefore continue to keep vigil and guard, lest neglect entail greater public evil than could be measured by any private loss of mine, who am ever ready to risk all my possessions and privileges for your well-being, as you will see, and as is meet and fitting. Therefore, on your side, watch, labour, and doubt not; for these troubles cannot last many days." As the French still persisted in attempting to scale the walls of Forli, every gate was closed except that of Ravaldino, the approaches to which were guarded by armed citizens, bands of whom enrolled themselves in each parish. Thomas Feo—whom Bernardi describes as "night and day on guard, in a coat of mail, with a stout club in his hand, giving great blows to those French, without respect to persons, for in truth they swarmed up the walls like cats"—was foremost among the defenders of Forli. Several leaders went to the fort to ask the Governor and council for provisions, who replied that it was difficult to

[1] See p. 347, vol. i. of *Caterina Sforza, di Pier Desiderio Pasolini.* Roma, Loescher.

supply the wants of an army that sacked the country and paid no one. The French captains replied that their king did not sanction such violence, and guaranteed the security of the mills, provided the commune would purvey the army. The Count de Ligny ordered all his soldiers to evacuate Forli under penalty of the gallows.

On the 18th, Charles VIII. entered Florence, and instructed D'Aubigny to cross the Apennines, and to join the other French division which was concentrating in Tuscany. When Catherine heard that the departure of the French was fixed for the 23rd she returned to Forli to entertain the generals (among whom were D'Aubigny, Ligny, the Lords of Carpi and Mirandola, the Marquis of Mantua, and the two Sanseverino). They were amazed at the splendour of the banquet, and declared that they had never seen nor imagined a woman to be compared with Catherine. Catherine made use of this admiration in favour of her beloved Giacomo Feo, on whom King Charles, who was encamped at Siena, conferred the rank of a Baron of France.

Catherine's existence now became complicated by anxiety for her brother, whose days were numbered, and the necessity of temporizing with her uncle, who continued to usurp his power. When Charles VIII. had recovered from the small-pox, which had detained him at Asti, he went to stay with Giovanni Galeazzo, Duke of Milan, at his Castle of Pavia. The beautiful and unfortunate Isabel of Aragon—to the extermination of whose house King Charles had been summoned to Italy—cast herself weeping at the feet of the King, and Charles had left Pavia, touched by her tears, but unable to console her by any promise. On arriving at Piacenza with the Moro, on October 20, he learned that the Duke of Milan was dead.

Documentary evidence is not wanting to contradict the contemporary rumour that Ludovic poisoned his nephew, but it cannot defend his action in supplanting his nephew's heir, and in causing himself to be proclaimed Duke by the terror-

ized citizens. The unhappy Isabel, with her four children, was interned in the Castle of Pavia.

Ludovic, in announcing her brother's death to his niece Catherine, added that the citizens "had entreated him to be pleased to assume the burden of being their Lord."

Catherine could not venture on direct recrimination, but many of her letters betray a repulsion that may not always be attributed to political causes. Outwardly, she was constrained to mark the assumption of Ludovic with rejoicing and the customary illuminations and ringing of bells at Imola and Forli.

The coronation of Ludovic was fixed for May 20. Catherine's envoy conveyed to him at the same time her congratulations, and her entreaty that she might not be coerced in co-operating in the war with France, which the Moro, now in league with the Pope and Venetians, was contemplating. Charles VIII. had seized Naples without laying hand to his sword. "For no man had shown his face to him . . . they all fled like vile effeminates; and the King of Naples and his son, the Duke of Calabria, took to flight without waiting to be chased," writes Cobelli; "and Ludovic having made himself Duke of Milan, he feared that if the King of France assumed the crown of Naples, he would become Lord and Emperor of Italy. Then it was that the Lord Ludovic, Duke of Milan, wrote to the Pope and the Signory (of Venice) that these French were so puffed up with pride that they were capable of supplanting all the princes of Italy, whom it therefore behoved to provide . . . *et cetera* . . ."[1]

It was in vain that Ludovic, by means of Francesco Quartieri, persuaded Catherine to adhere to the side espoused by Milan, rather than to Florence, which, in his opinion, was too much divided against itself, owing to discord in the House of Medici, to be of help to other States. Catherine's sympathy with Florence, and her regret for the death of Lorenzo the Magnificent, "the like of whom could not be reproduced by Nature," were unceasing. The Moro would have preferred

[1] Cobelli, p. 368.

to find in Catherine a docile and unquestioning ally, while Catherine would neither renounce the support of the House of Sforza, nor her personal policy. She was then buoyed up by faith in the Pope. "The Pope," she said, "will do more for me than I could ask of him: would that it were so with those of my blood."

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE ASSASSINATION OF GIACOMO FEO

CATHERINE, in the midst of danger from within and without, had succeeded in securing and pacifying her little State, which seemed compact of order, civic concord, and reverent love for the sovereign Lady. But the worm was at the core. The secret correspondence of a Florentine commissioner with Piero de' Medici gives some insight into the domestic life of Catherine under these precarious conditions. Bello da Castrocaro, sent by Puccio Pucci from Faenza to Forli, to question the Countess as to the passage of some Milanese troops, was admitted to her presence. Her youthful lover, in a scarlet satin coat with a short cloak of cloth-of-gold negligently thrown across his shoulders, was seated on a window-sill. Near to him sat Catherine on a "cathedra," or heavy wooden chair, wearing a loose gown of white brocade with a black scarf. "In beauty, they were like two suns."

On that day, some soldiers, a page of Catherine's and one of Messer Jacopo had tilted and fenced for their amusement. Catherine's page had been victorious until the end, when the other had overpowered him, and "Maestro Lazaro, *hebreo*, who was prodigiously learned in surgery, had been summoned to mend his head, arm, and leg." Bello was graciously received by the Countess on another occasion, but always in the presence "of Messer Jacopo, without whose presence she will not speak; indeed what Madonna says is either confirmed, or the reverse, by Messer Jacopo." In discussing the current subjects of the hour they had both expressed an opinion that

all the soldiers who came from Lombardy to Romagna were sent "to drive away Messer Jacopo." But both Catherine and Giacomo were prepared to face extermination; "Madonna would see her subjects, her children and her chattels buried, and they will give their souls to the devil and the State to the Turk, sooner than abandon each other."

And woe to Bello if he had betrayed this conversation to another than the Florentine commissioner! She would have sought him to the world's end and had him cut to pieces.

In another letter to Piero Medici, Pucci writes that—"The Fort is in the hands of Messer Jacopo, whose uncle is castellane thereof, and Madonna may not enter the Fort unless she is unattended . . . all the money and revenues pass through the hands of Messer Jacopo; he pays the soldiers, rides abroad with the pomp and circumstance of a reigning sovereign, and all appeals are received and replied to by him. This Jacopo is so hated at Rome and Milan, that, while his power lasts, Catherine will be obliged to lean on the Florentines and their allies, for there be none other whom she can trust. A catastrophe is imminent, and one of these three things cannot fail to happen: either Catherine will assassinate her lover, the lover will assassinate Catherine and her children, or Octavian, who appears to be a lad of spirit, will, on coming of age, put his mother and her lover to death. . . . If therefore Messer Jacopo has the wit with which he is credited, he will provide his own salvation without waiting for Octavian to reach man's estate."

This letter bears the date of May 25, 1493.

The fire smouldered under ashes for two years longer, during which Giacomo Feo became more odious to many, foremost among whom were the Marcobelli and Orcioli, who had earned the Countess's gratitude by the part they had played in her restoration, so that they became almost masters of the State and of herself. They cherished a mortal hatred of her favourite. Feo, conscious of their envy, most scrupulously avoided giving them offence, hoping to appease them by dint of prudence and affability, but they had become as

powerful as the Orsi under Count Girolamo, so that their ill-feeling could not long remain secret. At Forlimpopoli, in the presence of Cardinal Raphael, the Orcioli had so vehemently abused Feo that the Countess, who could not feign ignorance, was obliged to imprison them in the Castle of Brisighella. Her affection for them was so great that she soon recalled them, and as a proof of renewed confidence, sent one of them to Forlimpopoli to intercept the inroads of the Neapolitan troops.

The Orcioli, who came out of prison with renewed hatred of Feo and the determination to remove him, were soon in league with the Marcobelli. A former servant of the Orcioli, now in the service of Feo, kept them informed of his movements, but their first attempt on his life at Santa Croce miscarried.

The cloud thickened, the storm threatened, but Feo kept guard on himself, and the bolt did not fall, though Catherine's position became daily more painful and precarious. All her pride and courage had not availed to save her from becoming completely subject to the caprices of her lover in matters public or domestic. She screened them as best she could, but felt herself at fault and dared not murmur; her children, no less enslaved and victimized than their mother, were sore and rebellious at heart. None could cross her threshold without a thrill of abysmal horror. The astute Florentine had divined the approaching crisis.

Octavian, now sixteen, was surrounded by zealous partisans who fanned the flame by representing Feo as an arrogant intruder whose undue influence had sullied and alienated his mother; they reminded him he was the prince, the real head of the State; it was time to be up and doing. One day that Feo had provoked him beyond the ordinary bounds, the boy retorted with all the venom that embittered him, and Feo struck him in the face. Catherine stood by and shuddered; her bosom heaved and her eyes shone with unshed tears, but she dared not speak. How could she defend her son against her lover? She was conscious of her fault, degraded and ill at ease.

Her other children and her guards were present: there was angry silence; the fatal spark had reached the mine.

Gian Antonio Ghetti, of Imola, an armour-bearer to Octavian, presented himself in the name of Catherine's children to the Orcioli and Marcobelli, to gain their support against Feo, whom he had helped to supplant his brother at Ravaldino, but who had refused to pay what he owed him. "You will never succeed in touching him," he said to these implacable enemies of the favourite. "I must make an end of it. If you are willing, I will kill him for you. . . ."

He enlisted the services of a relative, Domenico Ghetti; his friends, the Mazzolani, lent him an active peasant who was no novice in such matters, and he had a trusty servant who was an expert in them. They were joined by Filippo dalle Selle of Bologna and Don Domenico da Bagnacavallo and Don Antonio, surnamed Pavagliotta, two priests of evil fame, who were easily persuaded that their services would be acceptable to Cardinal Raphael Riario and to Octavian in delivering the unhappy Countess from the usurper.

It was August 27, 1495. The Countess, with her daughter Bianca and some of her women, was returning in her chariot from the chase, at the hours of vespers. She was followed by her sons, Octavian and Cæsar, by Giacomo Feo, and a great number of equerries and men-at-arms; a joyous party laden with spoil and singing merry songs. The traitors had secreted themselves behind the Bogheri Bridge. Gian Antonio Ghetti came forward to meet Giacomo Feo, who threw him a familiar "How goes it, Gian Antonio, where do you come from?" "Well, well, my Lord." And while the traitor said these words, his servant speared Feo through and through. Then Gian Antonio fell upon him. "Alas! I am a dead man!" cried the poor knight. Don Domenico seized his horse by the bridle and dragged it to the church of St. Bernard where the two priests fell upon him until he dropped from the saddle. "O Lord! O Madonna, I am murdered!" cried the victim, while the assassins struck him across the face. They dragged the unhappy Feo, mutilated beyond recognition, but still

living, and threw him into a pit, where, says Bernardi, "the poor captain, praying the Eternal to forgive him his sins, gave up the ghost."

As soon as Catherine heard the noise, she turned, and, as if she had divined the horrible occurrence, sprang from her carriage, and leapt on to a soldier's horse. She fled, followed by Cæsar and Octavian, to the citadel. But her sons, feeling they might be regarded as accomplices, did not dare to enter it with their mother, and took refuge under the roof of Paolo Denti. The men-at-arms, equerries and servants had vanished, terrorized. Two only of the suite had turned and perceiving what had happened, had bravely returned to the bridge. They were Francesco Tomasoli of Forli and Bartolomeo Martinengho. Tomasoli struck a blow at Ghetti, who was unhurt, because of his coat of mail. He turned calmly to his two assailants saying, "That which we are doing is done by command of Madonna and the Lord Octavian."

Tomasoli and Martinengho, amazed by this reply, were no less surprised when they beheld the two priests dyed with the blood of Feo, who confirmed what had been said. And when the latter cried "Octavian! Octavian!" they, believing that they were empowered to act and to cry, raised their voices in unison with those of the assassins. Soon these voices were blended with the cries of the populace; and a great crowd, headed by the conspirators, poured into the square, to the cries of "Caterina! Caterina! Ottaviano! Ottaviano!"

The news spread throughout the city, from every corner of which citizens poured into the square. "People, people of Forli!" roared the assassins; "come forth! we have already killed that traitor who was Giacomo Feo! Forth! Come forth!" Catherine's auditor heard the cries from the palace. He came out and was met by Ghetti, who boldly accosted him, saying that in obedience to the Countess and Octavian, he had been obliged to put Feo to death.

The auditor, who as inspector of police was well versed in Court mysteries, asked himself whether Catherine had been driven to this desperate step to free herself from a position that was incompatible with her sovereign and maternal duties.

. . . In such a position as hers the dreadful fact was not inadmissible. The auditor would neither sanction nor punish without the Regent's instructions. . . He accordingly slipped through the crowd, and, beckoning to a son of the notary Aspini, bid him fly to the citadel to acquaint the Countess with the communication imparted to him by Ghetti and the tenor of the people's cries.

The youth returned with the news that the Countess, in despair at the murder of her lover and rage at the audacious calumny of the murderers, demanded instant and condign vengeance. Catherine's wishes could not have tallied more completely with those of the auditor, who had never lost sight of Ghetti. He sprang upon him and seized him, crying, "Accursed traitor, what have you told me?" and as Ghetti struggled to free himself, he added, "Hold! liar, hold! Come to Madonna in the Fort!" Ghetti shook himself free. "A hundred ducats in the name of Madonna to him who will deliver to her or prove that he has killed Gian Antonio Ghetti! In the name of Madonna the Countess! A hundred ducats!" cried the auditor, while Ghetti tried to disappear in the crowd. Don Antonio, Filippo dalle Selle, and Bernardino Ghetti gained the walls and leapt from them; Don Domenico hid himself in a chest in the house of his brother-in-law; and covered with wounds, Gian Antonio Ghetti, followed in his desperate flight by the crowd, was struck dead by a blow that cut his head in two, close to the loggia of the Dome, by Bernardo Mangianti. "He had lost all human semblance," writes Cobelli, who, "being in the square, had run in haste to see." A little later, he says that he entered the church of the Black Flagellants, whither some pious persons, having recovered the mangled body of the late Vice-regent from the pit by the bridge, had conveyed it. "And there I saw Messer Iacomo Feo dead, on a bier. Oh! the pity and the cruelty of it! Oh, reader, certes I never saw the like of that face that had been so beautiful. It looked like a pomegranate that had been torn open and hacked. I could not refrain from weeping, remembering him so fair and white and clean, who now lay hideous in his clotted blood, wrapped in his bedraggled coat

of cloth-of-gold. . . Never had man been feared as was this man, at Forli. . ."

That night Catherine sent word to Thomas Feo, who had resumed his post at Imola, that his brother had been murdered, and requested that his sisters be sent from Imola and Bologna to Forli . . . also "that the house of Antonio da Ghia (Gian Antonio Ghetti) be destroyed and his wife (once a favourite and favoured woman of the Bed-Chamber to Catherine), his children, and any of his relations they could lay hands upon, be put to death." According to Cobelli, who herein differs from the Sassatelli and other Imolese, who had their own reasons for blackening her memory, this order did not emanate directly from Catherine. One relative of Ghetti's was hanged and afterwards quartered at Imola; the unhappy wife of Gian Antonio, the beautiful Rosaria, was dragged to the Fort of Forli, and there, with her two little children, thrown down a spiked well.

On the evening of the 28th, pending the arrival of the invited mourners, the body of Giacomo Feo was quietly transferred to the church of San Girolamo, where a temporary monument was erected. In the square a great catafalque supported a bier covered with cloth-of-gold and surrounded by many torches. At the hour of vespers on the following day, thirty crosses—followed by the religious of their various orders, each bearing a torch—were carried into the square. The magistrates, with their wives, proceeded to the fort to attend the Countess's guests.

The first to leave the fort was Paolo dall' Aste, the bishop's vicar, in whose suite were Scipio, natural son of Count Girolamo and Bernardino, the son of Catherine and Feo, five years old, who had been re-named Charles in gratitude to the King of France for making his father a baron. Then came the auditor of the Countess, followed by the magistracy, the gentlemen of Catherine's household, the relatives of Giacomo, his sisters with the noble ladies of Forli, the ladies and maids-of-honour of the Countess, twelve pages clad in mourning and three others in gold and silver, on

superbly caparisoned horses, one of whom carried the sword and gold spurs, another the helmet, and the third the cuirass of the dead knight. In this order the *cortège*, with a great number of men-at-arms in gorgeous liveries, entered the church, where, after solemn obsequies, Fra Ludovico of Forli pronounced an oration in praise of the deceased. On the following day, Catherine notified to her subjects that Giacomo Feo had been her legitimate consort.

The body of Gian Antonio Ghetti was hung to a pole under an archway of the palace. Don Domenico da Bagnacavallo was taken from the shelter of his brother-in-law's house, and was tortured by fire until he revealed the names of his accomplices and the motive of the conspiracy, into which he had been inveigled by Ghetti's statement that the Countess, the Lord Octavian, and the Cardinal Raphael wished Feo to be put to death.

To this Catherine replied that the Riario had never been traitors, neither had the Sforza been known to hire assassins, when they wished to rid themselves of a man. The punishment of the wretched priest would therefore be of a nature to prove how the Riario loathed treachery. It is certain that had Catherine chosen to rid herself of Feo he would have disappeared in the fort and never more been heard of, but would not have been assassinated in a street. If Catherine's revenge passed all bounds, some of its excesses may be ascribed to her determination to wipe out this calumny. In avenging Girolamo, Catherine did not pass the bounds of the justice of her day. Now she was no longer a sovereign with the murder of her consort to avenge, but a woman hardened by the habit of command, of bloodshed and strife, a woman maddened to fury by the assassination of her lover, turning like a tigress on his murderers and their kin, revelling and exulting in their blood. The names of the Marcobelli and Orcioli were conspicuous in the long list of the priest's accomplices; Catherine's amazement at their ingratitude lent a new zest to her revenge.

On the conclusion of the priest's trial by the podestà the wretched man was handed over to a brutal executioner named Mongiardini, who stripped him and tied him by the feet to a horse's tail and thus dragged him to the bridge where Feo had met his fate, and thence to the square, where the soldiers, tired of chasing the horse, battered out what life remained in him, while with his last breath he muttered words of penitence and prayer. His body was strung up under the arch where hung that of Gian Antonio Ghetti. His house and that of his brother-in-law were sacked, and Giacomo dalle Selle, his two sons, and the sons of Filippo dalle Selle (the latter had escaped) cast into the dungeons of Ravaldino.

Mongiardini and his myrmidons knocked at the door of Bernardino Ghetti, brother of Gian Antonio, who had escaped, took his wife and three children in his stead and thrust them into the dungeons. Mongiardini then learnt that a child of five, belonging to Gian Antonio, was still in charge of his nurse; he ferreted him out, dragged him to the fort and there "immediately cut his neck."[1]

On the same morning of the 28th an edict was proclaimed ordering those who harboured conspirators or their property to give them up to justice, under penalty of the gallows. A few hours later, to the blare of trumpets, a second edict promised a thousand gold ducats and the possessions of the captive to him who brought one of the assassins, alive or dead. The public crier had no sooner read their edict, when a beautiful girl was dragged into the fort; she was the paramour of Don Pavagliotta with whom were three of the profligate priest's children. "They were immediately put to death," says Cobelli, "as also the children of Filippo dalle Selle," and it was rumoured, "two children of the House of Orso," who had been taken after the murder of Count Girolamo. The executioners had forced the Regent's hand; the punishment outstepped the offence.

Pietro Bosi and Giovanno Caroli (the latter master of the pantry to Catherine) were implicated and thrown into chains, and Don Pavagliotta was captured between Ravenna and

[1] Cobelli.

Ferrara, subjected to torture until he denounced the innocent with the guilty and then put to death with the same horrible refinements of cruelty to which Don Domenico had been subjected.

The Marcobelli had imprudently remained at Forli. Two of them perished in a scuffle with their jailers that night, and a third, named Agostino, was grievously wounded. The Countess, who heard cries of "Ottaviano! Ottaviano!" from her apartments, asked the meaning of these sounds at that hour. She appeared distressed by the occurrence, and ordered that every care be taken of Agostino. This benevolence was not extended to other members of the family, for soon afterwards his prison was shared by his brother Francesco. The sumptuous houses, large properties and lucrative warehouses of the Marcobelli and Orcioli were stripped and sequestrated, and the proceeds, which amounted to a considerable fortune, "given to whom Madonna chose." The women of these families were hunted from their empty houses by the auditor.

Caglianello, castellane of Schiavonia, a former dependent of Cardinal Raphael Riario, with whom he was known to have been in correspondence, Pietro Bosi, and Fra Ilario, once tutor to Catherine's sons, were imprisoned. The latter was liberated, but not before he had been so dislocated by torture that he went on crutches ever after. Catherine does not appear to have interfered with the liberty of public opinion; the only persons who suffered punishment for it were a peasant who had said, in a shop, that the conspirators were unwise in sparing Catherine when they killed Feo, and another who, at an inn, had dilated on the grounds the conspirators might have had for killing the Countess. They were imprisoned for inciting their hearers to sedition; one survived his punishment and was ultimately liberated, the other died of the damp and stench of the dungeon into which he had literally been thrown.

Catherine had fought the murderers of Girolamo, for and with her children, but in the death of Feo she must have felt they had a hand. They had sought refuge, away from

her, under the roof of Paolo Denti, the populace had fawned on them, paid homage to them, carried them to the palace and there again acclaimed them rightful lords. Two days passed before Catherine sent for them, and the people of Forli seized this occasion for what would now be termed a demonstration. Indignant with Catherine, they surrounded her children—who were led trembling to the fort, as into the lion's den—determined to protect them against their mother, to show them to her and to lead them in safety to the city. But the draw-bridge was let down, the great door opened and vomited a body of foot soldiers, armed to the teeth and covered with shining armour who charged the howling and retreating populace. When the people stopped the soldiers came up with them and cleared the way with their pikes to where the young lords, surrounded by their most zealous partisans, stood: they were hurried into the fort like prisoners of war, while the populace from whom they had been torn, continued to raise piercing cries. Then the cannon roared and the frightened crowd rushed back to the city. Soon, in every house and inn at Forli the Countess was slandered as a woman and accursed as a ruler. When night fell, the dungeons and secret places of the fort were filled with poor wretches who had been captured by force or strategy. Scipio, natural son of the late Count, raised his voice in protest against these cruelties, for which he was thrown into a dungeon, where he languished in chains for eighteen months. Lamed and ruined in health, he left his prison to take service with Catherine's enemies, the Venetians. Catherine realizing that the blow struck at Octavian had cost Feo his life, confined the former in the fort. He was her eldest-born and the head of the State, but she chose to avenge her lover without let or hindrance. All Romagna trembled, neighbouring Powers shuddered with horror, the Milanese Orator wrote from Bologna that he could not but grieve "that so much infamy be attributed to the Countess of Imola, seeing that she is of the House of Sforza." And Pope Alexander, hitherto not prone to scruple, lost faith in Catherine. "His Holiness," wrote Cardinal Ascanio Sforza,

"wonders and sorrows that she should venture to attack a cardinal and chamberlain (Cardinal Raphael Riario, who had helped to save the State for herself and her children) of the Holy See, thinking perhaps thereby to justify the unheard-of bloodshed committed within the last few days to satisfy a passion which, had she rightly governed herself, she should have buried." This hecatomb brought no peace to Catherine, who could never forget that the blood of innocent children had mingled with that of the guilty. From the blood of the first victims a kind of vapour, that blinded the sight, unhinged the brain of those who decreed, pronounced, and executed sentence, would seem to have arisen. The subterraneans of Ravaldino were turned into abodes of lamentation and death; the hall where the podestà examined prisoners rang with the clank of instruments of torture and the desperate cries of the victims; the air was polluted by the stench of burned and scalded flesh.

Small wonder if the voices and phantoms of the victims robbed Catherine of her sleep, and that in the watches of the night she was heard to call upon the children of Orso!

# CHAPTER XXII

## CATHERINE AND LUDOVICO IL MORO

TOWARDS the end of 1495 Catherine sent troops, under Achille Tiberti of Cesena and Cicognano of Castrocaro, against Guidoguerra, Count of Chiaggiolo, from whom they took Castelnuovo, Tudoranno, Molino Vecchio, Cosercoli, and other castles which he had taken from the Archbishop of Ravenna. The Venetians sent troops to recapture Castelnuovo, to the amazement of Catherine, who wrote the Milanese Orator in Bologna that she marvelled "they should so doggedly attack a petty castle, and for its sake utter such threats, that were I of a fearsome nature, I should have died of them . . . perchance to-day they give battle, but they need not think to win it with a cry of their *stradiotti*." Catherine, having made her protest, handed the useless castle over to the pontifical president at Cesena, saying that it was more the Pope's affair than hers to impede the progress of the Venetians in Romagna, and that to the protector of her family and the god-father of Octavian she made a free gift of Castelnuovo. Of this the president took no notice, while the castellane, possibly bribed by the Venetians, surrendered to them.

In that same year Catherine's troops, in conjunction with those of Venice and Bologna, repulsed Octavian Manfredi, who had been liberated by Charles VIII. after six years' imprisonment at Pisa. With the help of Vincenzo Naldi and the men of Valdilamone, Octavian Manfredi attempted to depose his cousin Astorre, Lord of Faenza (a minor, then betrothed to Catherine's daughter, Bianca). Naldi was pur-

sued as far as Brisighella, where his property was laid waste, and Octavian, poor and friendless, retired to Florence.

In 1496 Bernardi, among other phenomena, records a rain of stones, five of which he saw in the palace of the Lord of Valdinoce, who sent a fragment of one, weighing a pound and a half, as a present to Catherine. On these stones the learned and the astrologers wrote many dissertations. The year was otherwise memorable for floods that carried away bridges, winds that unroofed towers, famine and pestilence which the Countess alleviated as far as in her lay. She also embellished the fort by a beautiful park and partly destroyed the official palace, so that she need no longer look upon the walls wherein her first husband had met his death and she had been a prisoner of his assassins.

The chiefs among them died in exile within a few months of each other: Checco Orsi as chief officer, and Ludovic as Podestà of Camerino, it was rumoured of poison, with their wives, children and remaining relatives. "It would have been much better for them," remarks Bernardi, "had they not taken the trouble to assassinate the aforenamed Count, for then had they died in their beds. . . ."

Astorre Manfredi, the boy Lord of Faenza, had accepted the Venetian Protectorate, in virtue of which the Signory agreed to pay him 8000 ducats yearly and to defend his State. The Countess wrote to Ludovic, Duke of Milan, that the Venetian Resident was "so haughty, it seemed as if there were no lord but he . . . he cared for nothing but to capture the good-will of the populace." Fortunately the castellane was of another mind. Although not afraid of the enmity her words might provoke, she prayed the Duke not to mention either herself or her letters to the Venetians. A council summoned by the resident had determined on removing Astorre and the seat of Government to the palace, the official residence of the resident, "to which the Lord Astorgio, albeit a child, would not consent." Yet the die was cast, and the Venetian wife of the castellane would end in persuading him to retire in favour of a Venetian patrician, and the Signory would appoint one of their own captains at

Val da Lamone. In this manner the Venetians would absorb the State (of Faenza). Catherine did not think the Florentines had any designs on Faenza, but had promised herself to be vigilant on behalf of her future son-in-law, "who stood to her as a son."

Astorre sent an account of his grievances to Venice, and the Signory replied that despite their resident's urgent request, he might remain in the fort—the matter of the castellane was still under consideration. This question Catherine—persuaded that an enemy of Astorre would be appointed—held to be very grave, for his guardians had prohibited his removal from the fort during his minority, and the young lord had declared that nothing but force would induce him to leave the fort.

Catherine wrote again that the Venetians were "ill-disposed towards that castellane, and that the resident was lying in wait to play him a trick against which there would be no redress. And this castellane was the key to everything . . . it avails not, in such danger as this, to send Astorre's envoy to Venice. . . ." She could not sufficiently impress on the Duke "that the Venetians hanker after what is ours." That morning the Podestà of Ravenna had come to dine at a sanctuary on her territory on his way to Castelnuovo, which they had taken from her last winter. . . . Although it was but a paltry place, the Venetians "had their arms painted on it . . . and would hold and fortify it." At the same time they were intriguing to obtain possession of the State that had belonged to Guidoguerra . . . "to extend their possessions to these our hills. Now I submit to your judgment," the Countess added, "that if they be careful of these hovels, how much more eagerly will they set their minds to things of real importance?"

Meanwhile the house of Giovanni Bentivoglio, Lord of Bologna, had become a den of robbers in which Catherine's enemies from Rome and elsewhere conspired against her. Yet she wrote her uncle that she was comforted and of good cheer, knowing that the ducal orator had expressed his

master's displeasure to Bentivoglio. Though she confided in the Duke's protection, she was constantly pre-occupied by the inimical attitude of the Lord of Bologna. "I accept the counsel, given me by Your Lordship, which is in every way worthy of your wisdom and goodness, not to follow the example of others in avenging my wrongs, but rather to forgive them. Be therefore assured that had I not been more than once provoked and harried beyond measure, I would have tolerated this last occurrence as I have done before many times; *sed furor fit saepius laesa patientia*, and the not resenting so many injuries would encourage the wicked in evil doing. . . . Still I will so far restrain myself as the conduct of others may permit me to lean rather towards forgiveness than vengeance. . . ."

She dared no longer write to the ducal orator at Bologna on the subject of Faenza, for there were not wanting fresh proofs of Bentivoglio's ill-will. A mere ne'er-do-weel, who had run away for debt, had offered to reveal to her the names of persons who betrayed her trust in them; she thought this a silly fact in itself, yet a proof of bad feeling. . . . She had learned from Trachedini that Bentivoglio complained of her. It might well be that months ago, under provocation from Bentivoglio, she had said that she would give shelter to the Malvezzi who had conspired against him. Worse things might happen. Yet she had not done it. . . . "They complain of words who would not have me complain of deeds." She had not entertained any of his enemies, yet he had received the Broccardi and Vaini, exiled by her, and those who had conspired against her person; "my words are sins against the Holy Ghost, but their deeds are venial. . . ."

The letter of gravest import is dated March 27, 1496. Bentivoglio had intimated to Duke Ludovic that the Countess had sent persons who were in her confidence to murder Giovanni Battista de Broccardi at Bologna. "I will not deny the truth," replied Catherine to her uncle's queries. "If Messer Giovanni hath naught but hate for me, some people there are who love me, and knowing that man to be conspiring against my life, under the roof of Messer Giovanni,

many of my trusty ones came to me offering to deliver Broccardi into my hand, alive or dead. I, having been offended by him, and desiring to have him in my power, to the confusion of my enemies, did not refuse either offer, which I confess to have been ill done, as Your Excellency says. . . . But this should be matter for small marvel to Messer Giovanni, an he remember that I am composed of the same elements as himself, who hath persecuted those who offended him less grievously than did Broccardi me . . . even in holy places. We all feel our own grievances, wherefore he should cease to wonder if one day it be understood that I am not dead."

On April 9 Catherine wrote the Duke that she "had done her utmost to live on neighbourly terms with Messer Giovanni Bentivoglio": "Your Excellency is aware how willingly I consented to become related to him (Astorre Manfredi, betrothed to Bianca Riario, was grandson to Bentivoglio). Why should he conspire with Cardinal San Giorgio (Raphael Riario) for my ruin? Why lend himself to intrigues to depose me? I will have nothing more to do with him, either as a kinsman or in any other capacity, and will henceforward show myself to him as he is to me, doubting not that when his ears have been sufficiently pulled by Your Excellency, he will no longer interfere with me nor mine. And I, unless I be provoked, will not interfere in the affairs of others."

But how could she avoid being entangled in the affairs of others? Her neighbour's houses were on fire. In the preceding July, the Tiberti of Cesena had stirred up a tumult in the town. "Yesterday," wrote the Countess to the Duke of Milan, "they hanged the house-steward of the Archbishop of Arles and helped Guidoguerra to capture the old fort, to the cry of '*Chiesa, Chiesa!*'" Of this the Countess hastened to inform the Pope (being, as she said, the better able to gauge events that were happening so near to her), and as he was in great danger of losing Cesena she added that it behoved him to take immediate measures. She concluded: "I have no other end in appealing to Your Holiness but

the immense zeal and affection I bear to Holy Church, and especially to the person and honour of Your Holiness, of whom I have ever been, and shall remain to my life's end, the devoted daughter and servant."

In August Pope Alexander sent the Archbishop of Arles to restore order at Cesena, asking for the co-operation of Catherine and her neighbours against Guidoguerra and other disturbers of the peace. Catherine replied that, "holding as We do this Vicariat, I will do all that is possible, promptly and willingly." She knew not what would happen next; Guidoguerra was then mining the New Fort. Meanwhile he had quarrelled with the Tiberti, "who hitherto had been as one with him," and, suspecting them of designs on his life, had slain a chief of their party, while his people had killed seven others. The Tiberti had retired to the fort, and their houses had been sacked.

One night the Martinelli of Cesena assailed a castle of the Tiberti, took it, with the wife and children of Messer Polidoro (Tiberti), and threatened to turn the whole brood out of Cesena. "The Tiberti," wrote Catherine to Ludovic, "have ever been devoted to me and my State." Seeing that the quarrel between the two families was not complicated by the intervention of "principalities and powers," Catherine had permitted some of her soldiers to side with the Tiberti, who were joined by those sent by the Duke of Urbino, and the castle was besieged. The besieged, failing the succour they expected from the Lord of Rimini, surrendered on condition that all aliens within the walls should leave with a safe-conduct. Some of the Martinelli with their braves threw themselves unconditionally on the mercy of the Commune. "But no sooner had my people and those of Urbino retired," wrote the Countess, "than a Commissioner sent by the Commune had them all hung up to the battlements: a most horrible spectacle."

Meanwhile, Catherine's most bitter anxieties came to her from Rome. "Were it not for my hope and faith in Your Excellency," she wrote the Duke of Milan, "I should have

to think of going to drown myself." Once the cardinals of her blood had been her refuge, now everything was reversed. Her nephew, Cardinal Raphael, had turned so violently against her that Ludovic had confiscated his Lombard revenues. Catherine thanked him, adding that "within three or four days she would send full account of those who had participated in the said machinations." She entreated him to instruct his orator in Rome to see to it that a certain conspirator be conscientiously examined, and to prove to the Pope that she is as a daughter to the Duke, whom if she be in error, none other may presume to correct. Cardinal Ascanio, instead of defending her, was in league with Cardinal Raphael . . . who even during the lifetime of Count Girolamo had begun to repay his benefits with the money of ingratitude. She added that for many reasons she would wish to have gone to Milan, but "that daughter of mine (Bianca betrothed to Astorre Manfredi) is growing up; neither would the times, nor affairs of State permit my absence."

Gianfrancesco Gonzaga, menaced by Bentivoglio, sought to ally himself with Catherine, whom he knew was exposed to the same danger, by the marriage of his daughter to Octavian. Catherine, without committing herself to refusal, replied that "the prevailing turbulence and bad case of Italian affairs obliged her to set aside every consideration but the preservation and weal of her State." The Gonzaga appealed to Ludovic, Duke of Milan, to whom the Countess reiterated—"Until I see the things of Italy take a better turn, I am not minded to give a wife to my son, in whose marriage I cannot overlook my own advantage." When she had consented to the betrothal of Bianca to the grandson of Bentivoglio, Messer Giovanni "had attempted to govern us over here . . . therefore I must adequately consider the matter and then ask Your Excellency's advice." The times were indeed troublous, and Catherine was torn between her desire to hold to her alliance with her uncle's State and the sympathy which drew her ever closer to the Florentine Republic—a sympathy which, since the arrival of Giovanni Medici the Florentine envoy, was strengthened by a new and personal

element. Despite her impetuous but loyal nature, the Countess found herself enmeshed in the most difficult of all policies, that of dissimulation.

"I wonder," she wrote the Duke, "that Your Lordship should write me that you hear that I am treating with Florence for the levying of troops. . . . Had I thought of such a thing, I should have written to Your Lordship for advice. Am I then so wanting in good faith, love and reverence that I could so deceive one to whom I would fain be as a daughter? And had I not been minded to accept Your Lordship's advice, I would have frankly said so, as to a father. . . . I have no business in Florence, unless it be to buy stuffs and to try and recover certain things I have there in pawn. Forget not to provide my son Octavian with an honourable opening, of which for every reason he is as deserving as any other in Italy. For in idleness there is neither use nor honour."

On this "opening for Octavian" she insists in a second letter, in which she expresses her pleasure in the Duke's approval of her neutrality and his refusal to give credence to rumours anent her alliance with Florence. Her trust in him was such that "had she one thought more than another, she would have declared it to him."

But in November all traces of this confidence and filial pliancy had vanished. "We have never ceased to remind you to avoid giving offence to the Most Holy League," wrote Duke Ludovic, "yet have you heedlessly persevered in doing only that which seemed good to you." After reproaching her for permitting an export of wheat from Forli to Florence, the Duke proceeds—"We have not failed to entreat you as we should a daughter or sister, therefore we pray Your Ladyship will hold us excused should aught occur which you wish to avert, for We have not failed to admonish and advise you for your good as if it had been Our own: for if Your Ladyship thinks that conceding to the Florentines that of which the League seeks to deprive them, so that thereby they may be obliged to join it, is a small matter, you are mistaken, for it will offend the League. . . ." "Doubt not," he continued,

on November 12, "that We will willingly do all We can for you and yours. But we do not hide from you that in not sending your orators to the King, and in permitting the Florentines to draw forage from your land, We cannot think you love Us as you should, which We regret the more for your own sake."

Now timid, now daring, Catherine strove to emancipate herself from her uncle's tutelage and to cast in her lot with Florence, centre of her hopes and aspirations. Giovanni Medici, once her neighbour, was now her guest, her friend, lover, counsellor, and the arbiter of her State. For him she was ready to imperil that sovereign power she had both used and abused. She was on the eve of another secret marriage.

# BOOK VI

## THE HOUSE OF MEDICI

# CHAPTER XXIII

## GIOVANNI POPOLANO

Giovanni di Pierfrancesco Medici, born in 1467, was the handsomest and one of the most accomplished Florentines of his short day. During the lifetime of Lorenzo il Magnifico, Giovanni had presumed to love a lady beloved by his cousin Piero, and a lawsuit, instigated by the hatred and jealousy of the future head of the republic, had resulted in the confinement of Giovanni and his brother Lorenzo to their respective villas of Caffaggiolo and Castello, under the pretext of alleged secret negotiations with France.

To put an end to this ill-feeling, Lorenzo il Magnifico purposed giving a daughter in marriage to one of his nephews, but she had died, it was rumoured, of poison administered by a brother, to frustrate the marriage project and the reconciliation.

The nature and extent of the brothers' negotiations with Charles VIII. were never fully elucidated: the Florentine people were dissatisfied with their imprisonment and anxious for their delivery; a wish soon to be gratified by their flight. Giovanni joined Charles VIII. at Vigevano, and succeeded in persuading him that the Florentines were favourable to him and would ally themselves with him if he found means to rid them of his tyrannical cousin, Piero de Medici. The king therefore advanced on Naples by the Tuscan road, the Florentines dismissed Piero, and Giovanni, on recovering his civic rights, changed his surname to that of Popolano, in gratitude to the republican party.

In 1496 and 1497 he was appointed Ambassador to Imola and Forli and Commissioner for all the Florentine possessions in Romagna, where the political effects of his presence were soon apparent in Catherine's rule. "In the year 1498," says an ancient writer,[1] "she contracted an alliance with the Florentines by means of the Magnificent Giovanni de Medici, with whom our lady the Countess was so infatuated that she would hear of no other power." According to Cobelli, "every one thought of him as a mere ambassador, and as such he has, for many months, sojourned in the citadel: since then our Illustrious Madonna has had a chamber nobly painted and adorned near to her own apartment and there has lodged the Magnificent Giovanni. . . ."

The Milanese Orator in Bologna, who had been instructed to watch Catherine, had written the Duke on October 10, 1496, that Giovanni Medici was staying with the Countess, by whom he was treated with marked favour, and that competent persons had told him that, in all probability, she had married him. Giovanni Bentivoglio fanned the flame by telling the ducal orator that Catherine had liberated prisoners at the intercession of Giovanni Medici, whom she would marry "as soon as she had built herself a safe nest." A few days later, Count Nicolò Rangoni informed the orator that Catherine had a secret understanding with the King of France relative to her marriage. Alarmed at this news, Ludovic instructed the orator to send a confidential person to his niece, informing her of current rumours, which he (the orator) "did not dare repeat to the Duke without her sanction."

"You do well," wrote Catherine to the orator, "not to give credence to the gossip of Bologna . . . which, however, does not surprise me, as these are not the first slanders that have been fabricated in that place to do me an injury. . . . May God give them enough to think of for themselves, so that they may forget to gossip about others. According to them I have already taken to myself many husbands: yet an I chose to have one, I would that he be given me by my Lord Duke, my uncle, who alone hath that right. But I am no

[1] *Storia di Romagna*, MS.

longer of an age to be governed by such juvenile appetites, and the government of my State occupies my whole thought. Yet the wicked, who have never ceased from persecuting me in my honour and person, will not stay their fabrications; perchance, one day their malignity will be recognized and punished . . . if not in this world, in the next. I have neither married, nor sent Giovan Bettino to France, neither have I trafficked nor treated with any one: had I wished to do so, it would not be without the consent of the afore-named Lord Duke my uncle, whom I revere as a father as in duty and propriety bound. . . . Forli, vij November 29. . . ."

The orator communicated the whole correspondence to the Duke, adding that he had pretended to believe in Catherine's assertions. He had sent his letter to Forli by his secretary, Anton Bugado, "habited like a cavalier" . . . a wily man on whom he had enjoined to deftly sift the matter, but he had returned saying that it was not spoken of in public either at Forli or Imola. Benedetto Aldrovandi, Podestà of Forli and brother-in-law of the late Giacomo Feo, had neither affirmed nor denied the fact, saying that within a few days he would be in Bologna and would tell the orator "verbally of what had happened." Before Bugado had left, the Podestà had recalled him and said—"You will convey the reply of the Countess to the ducal orator, but supposing it were true, what would happen?" "Were it true it would have to stand, but Madonna's marriage with a merchant citizen would be derogatory to her. . . . Oh, nobody would cavil at that, but rather for some other reason," the Podestà had replied, with a subtle smile.

It was the custom of Giovanni Medici, after hearing mass, to go to the Countess in the fort, and after discussing with her any letters that might have arrived, to return to dine in his own apartment, which was the one which had been occupied by Feo, and it was there that after dinner he received the secretary and auditor of Catherine: all those who desired audience of her sought it through Giovanni, who settled every question, as if he had been her lieutenant. He lived there with sixteen servants and twenty-five horses and

mules. Bugado had not been able to see the Countess, who had kept her room from an attack of fever.

Those Venetians who discussed matters with the Milanese Orator, said that Catherine owed the stability of her State to Milan and Venice and that she must look to these powers for her future salvation, instead of those (the Florentines) to whom must be ascribed her past adversities (the murder of Girolamo). The Doge had said that "the nature of her sex, which had often led her into error, must be her excuse, but she must not be permitted by her uncle to persevere in her present mistaken enterprise."

Meanwhile, Catherine wrote her uncle that she would never cease to be, unto him, an obedient daughter, and would never take any important decision without consulting him; her greatest sorrow was that the wicked had the power to make him doubt her. But soon he would realize her affection for him and the malignity of her enemies, for the orator would explain everything to him. . . .

Indeed, Trachedini had been requested to go in person to Forli, and Catherine had sent Octavian to meet him two miles outside the town, and that evening, accompanied by her children, she received him in the apartment lately built for Octavian. The orator on presenting his letters, said that he had matters of importance to discuss with the Countess. The Countess then gave every one but himself permission to retire and they were left alone. The orator said that although the Duke his master did not believe the current rumour of her alliance with France and Florence, he had charged him to learn directly, from her own lips, whether she intended to side with France, or with the League, as it was her interest and duty. . . . The Countess gently and graciously replied, it pained her that the Duke should imagine things to be possible that were absolutely the reverse . . . such as the supposition that she thought of marriage for herself or her children without first consulting him, who was to her as a father . . . and ignoring her union with Feo, added that "until now she had never thought of taking a husband since she had been widowed of the Count her consort."

The Florentines had made advances to her, but she distrusted them, and it seemed to her "a noble sport" to be a spectator of passing events, with her State at peace under the protection of the Duke her uncle. To be with whom was to be with the League: she would neither ally herself, unless obliged to do so, with France nor other powers: for her children she wished that they might owe their career and advancement to him, rather than to others. "And here took God to witness that she laid bare to me the core and innermost of her heart: if it be otherwise she is willing for Your Excellency to deprive her of her State and even of life." . . . The Countess then wished him good-evening, as if to dismiss him, but the orator continued to convey to her the Duke's expressions of good-will, and then, as if of his own accord, entered "on rumours that were to her discredit" . . . the prolonged stay of Giovanni Medici . . . of which the Orator spoke in a manner "opportune and consistent, from the lips of a devoted servitor."

Catherine replied that Giovanni Medici was not there to interfere in her government, but as a guest to whom she owed courtesy for service rendered. He had lent and procured for her about 10,000 ducats, to redeem jewels and plate that from the time of Count Girolamo had been partly at Modena and partly in the hands of Domenico Ricci of Genoa. She had given Giovanni about 6000 sacks of wheat. The Florentines had asked him for some of it for forage, but as yet he had not given them any. At first she had welcomed him for his evident devotion to the Duke of Milan, then he had given her to understand that he wished to stay away from Florence for some time to avoid the clash of party, perhaps because he disapproved of the present democratic government. True, he had a suite of sixteen persons and some horses, but his great liberality repaid the expense of entertaining him. To Bianca, he had given brocade that was worth more than three hundred ducats, to her brothers velvets and silks of even greater value. With Giovanni was his friend Filippo Ridolfi and another Florentine named Corbizo, who was useful to her in supervising the accounts of her factors.

Ridolfi had discovered that she had "been eaten" and preyed upon and had obliged some of them to disgorge two or three thousand ducats: others, to avoid exposure, had fled. The Countess ended the audience by saying that Giovanni Medici would have the honour of paying his respects to her uncle's envoy.

"I," wrote the orator, "being in the citadel of Forli, where sojourned also Giovanni de' Medici, on the morning of the New Year (1497) he came to visit me at my lodging, first, he said, to pay his respects to the representative of the Duke of Milan, and to renew, in the person of the orator, that friendship which had ever subsisted between the two houses. Without waiting to be questioned, he at once proceeded to justify his presence at Forli, repeating, 'but with less art and grace,' Catherine's explanation, almost word for word. It would not always be thus, the day would come when he and his would be able to prove their affection for the House of Sforza; but this was not the moment, although he and his house were as ever ready to stake their life and power for the former, so intimately were the fortunes of the two families bound together . . . showing that not a hair grew on him that was inclined to France. . . . On departing, he declared to me," continues Trachedini, "that he preferred meanwhile to be the guest of Madonna than any one else's, feeling as he did so much at home under the roof of one of your blood: Madonna to him represents Your Excellency, for whose sake he helped her in the loan she needed, as well as for old friendship's sake and to mark his appreciation of her gracious hospitality."

He added that he never thought of going to France, there was no foundation for the Florentine rumour. Trachedini "thanked and praised him exceedingly." Giovanni inquired if he had news of the return of Charles VIII. . . . "I replied cautiously, *per verba generalia*, that I rather disbelieved than believed in it, for had the King intended to come he would not have waited for his kingdom to be lost and the number of his friends lessened. . . . This argument appeared to him

unassailable and he said no more, save 'perdition seize the King of France and those who love him.' . . . I, however, am not so credulous to take for granted these fair words of Giovanni, whom I have known for years, as I also know the Countess your niece to be too astute for me to pin my faith to their assertions."

A few days later, Battista Sfondrati, ducal orator at Venice, wrote the Duke that the reply of the Countess had pleased the Doge, who yet had said that "Priests are not to be trusted . . . neither should you pin your faith to women."

Yet another few days and Trachedini wrote Duke Ludovic that Giovanni Bentivoglio had confided to him that he knew from an intimate friend of Giovanni de' Medici that "for certain the said Giovanni had married the illustrious Countess of Imola, and for excellent reasons the alliance will be kept secret for some time. . . . I know not what to say . . . *nisi maledictus homo qui confidit in homine et maxime in muliere.*"

A month later Benedetto Aldrovandi wrote Catherine from Bologna that the Milanese Orator had told him that her marriage had again been spoken of as an accomplished fact. She replied that there was no foundation for this calumny.

Catherine persisted in her denial, yet the report she denied was either true, or on the eve of becoming true. "Giovanni de' Medici," writes Vecchiazzani,[1] "had long served Catherine with the chivalry inherent to his illustrious birth. This gratified her, inasmuch as it is of great good fortune to princes to be served by nobles, and her gratitude was so vehement that it became love." She wedded her beloved, and was universally pitied for the enforced secrecy of this union, necessitated, as it was, by State reasons. The child to whom she gave birth, on April 6, 1498, was christened Ludovico, in honour of the Duke of Milan, but he lives in history as Giovanni delle *Bande Nere*, with the additional surname of *Italia*, because of the glory his country owes him, through whom the blood of Catherine was transmitted to the royal houses of England, France, Spain and Portugal. But, as

[1] *Storia di Forlimpopoli.*

Cobelli wrote, "none dared speak" of this event, for Catherine had taught her good people of Forli the danger of discussing her affairs.

Her third marriage did not bring her the discredit that had attended her union with Giacomo Feo, and she so ably demonstrated the political opportuneness of this alliance that it was sanctioned by Duke Ludovic and her eldest son. The Signory of Florence, on being acquainted with the marriage, conferred the freedom of the city on the Countess and her



GIOVANNI DE' MEDICI DELLE BANDE NERE (*after Titian*).

children, born or unborn, without any mention of Giovanni, lest the secret should transpire and supply Cardinal Raphael Riario with a pretext for depriving her of the regency and the guardianship of her children.

In 1497 Catherine built the Fort of Bubano, around which soon rose many private houses. In November of that year she, with the help of Maestro Bruchello, added other buildings to these, and finally a church, which, with great solemnity, she dedicated to the Virgin. The ancient fort was restored, strengthened, and completed by a wall with towers and

bastions, which surrounded the village, henceforward to be called *Castello della Contessa* "under penalty of a ducat." Catherine's idea, judged at the time to be a mere freak of fancy, was wholly strategic, for in 1494 the garrison of Bubano, thanks to its commanding position, had been able to stem the French invasion, thus closing Imola and a great portion of the territory to the invaders, who retired on Mordano.

This did not prevent the Sassatelli and others who wanted to extort compensation for losses sustained in war, from Catherine's children, by blackening their mother's memory



COSIMO DE' MEDICI, SON OF GIOVANNI.

from stating in a memorial that she had "erected the fort[1] . . . at the expense of the poor peasants who had been forced to drag the cement and other material to the site, while the master-carpenters and masons had to work gratis at the construction of the fort . . . as at Imola citizens had been obliged to draw water from the fort for the use of the soldiers (their defenders), to turn the grain belonging to Catherine (forage) to save it from moth, and to render other services it were shameless to write, so piteous was the servitude in which they lived until they were freed by Alexander VI.,

[1] Lawsuit between the Riario, the Commune, and some citizens of Imola. *Archivio Sassatelli Imola.*

the Vicar of Divine Justice, and Duke Valentino (Cæsar Borgia), its minister."

". . . I am not minded for the present to give a wife to the Lord Octavian, my son, and when I am so minded I shall have to think of finding a person suitable for the maintenance and prosperity of the house . . ." wrote Catherine, on January 18, to Duke Ludovic, who, "in reiterated letters," enjoined on her to give the daughter of the late Giovan Francesco Gonzaga to wife to her eldest son, adding that she united to other advantages that of being the grandchild of the King of Naples. Catherine thanked him for the honourable alliance suggested by his paternal affection, but reminded him that to himself, to Gasparre Sanseverino (better known as Fracasso) and to twelve monks sent to her by the maiden's mother, she had always declared that she would have none of this marriage. She was convinced that the Duke's letters were dictated by the importunities of others. She had said: "now let him convey her decision to the family of the maid once and for all."

In the following May the Bishop of Volterra arrived at Forli to offer Catherine, on behalf of Alexander VI., the greatest alliance that was then available in Italy. Would she accept his daughter, Lucretia Borgia, as a wife for her son Octavian? . . . What was there that she might not ask of the Pope? Cities, provinces, other States: the Riario would once more command the treasures of the Church, as they did under Sixtus IV. This proposal was made at the time that the most horrible accusations were levelled at Lucretia and especially at the Pope. In 1493 Lucretia had wedded Giovanni Sforza, Lord of Pesaro. In 1497 the Pope wished to annul this marriage, but to this his daughter's husband would not consent. One evening Giacomino, page or servant to Giovanni Sforza, was in the room of Madonna Lucretia; he heard the approaching steps of her brother Cæsar, and Giacomino, at her bidding, hid himself behind a portière. Cæsar entered, and in the course of conversation told his sister that he had given orders to kill her husband. When

Cæsar left, Lucretia said to Giacomino, "Hast heard? Go! tell him." Giacomino obeyed, and Giovanni Sforza mounted his Arab, which in twenty-four hours flew to Pesaro, where, on arriving, it fell dead. Thus Giovanni escaped the daggers and poison of his brother-in-law. In the following June, the body of the Duke of Gandia, elder brother of Cæsar, was found in the Tiber, and every one credited Cæsar with the assassination of his brother. In September Pope Alexander assembled a commission, which included two cardinals, to annul the marriage of Lucretia and Giovanni Sforza, and sentence to that effect was passed on December 20 amid the ridicule and scandal of all Italy.

The Bishop of Volterra, who was now the Pope's envoy to Catherine, was intimate with Giovanni de' Medici, and through him the Borgia hoped to gain their ends. He told every one of the new, vast, and splendid States that were reserved for the Riario, but did not venture to speak of them directly to the Countess, who was too wise not to have seen through his design. She heard of them through persons in whom the Bishop had confided, in the hope of finding co-operators among courtiers sufficiently ambitious to persuade Catherine to fall in with his views. For the rest, he held that the consequences of her acceptance were self-evident: she and hers would once more be arbiters of Italian politics and masters of the treasures of the Church. The consequences of her refusal were the enmity of the Pope, the possible loss of her States, and the probable dagger and poison of the Borgia.

Catherine's very soul revolted at the suggestion. "I understand," she wrote her trusty Christofero Ricerboli, "that their plan is to remove me from here. I have replied that as my son is about to travel to perfect himself in the art of war, I do not intend to entangle him in this labyrinth at the outset of his career, but intend him to be free to become a man. Nor do I believe that the afore-named lords, my uncles, would foist upon me the wife of another, who for three years had shared the bed of one of our House. This could not be unless I could believe . . . in the shame and infamy of Their

Lordships. They know too well that all my past anguish and dangers merit other remuneration, and I am capable of enduring anything before I will submit to leave this, unless of my own will.

"I am writing fully to the afore-named Lord Duke, my uncle, so that when he is applied to he will know how to answer. When I wish to give a wife to my son I shall not choose a person prejudicial to my needs and peace. . . . His Holiness will take offence at my refusal, but to that I give little thought, being careful We should not be wanting in the duty We owe to him of faithful vicars. . . ."

Catherine had saved the State for her son, and had guarded it for him, but now Octavian was of an age to acquire experience, and to make a reputation for himself. His mother realized that without this all her efforts and strategy would be vain; she grieved that he should grow up fat and lymphatic, with the sluggish temperament of his father. She longed to emancipate him, and an occasion presented itself where least she had expected it. The Pisans, wishing to retain the liberty granted them by Charles VIII., had obtained help from the Venetian Senate to resist the Florentines, who were attempting to subjugate them anew. The Venetians intended to establish a protectorate over the Republic of Pisa, and thus obtain a port in the Mediterranean, and they also intended replacing Piero de' Medici, who for four years had lived in exile. War had raged for some time, when in 1498 the Florentines, who had hitherto been unfortunate, were signally defeated at Santo Regolo. Florence, in dismay, sought aid from the Baglioni of Perugia, the Vitelli of Città di Castello, and the Bentivoglio of Bologna. Catherine, known to have long trafficked in arms and ammunition, to have levied and trained foot and horse, was requested to place her son Octavian, with a good company, in the service of the Republic. To this Catherine agreed without hesitation, happy to combine her son's interest with that of the husband to whom she could refuse nothing, while Giovanni Medici was glad to help his country and put an obstacle in the way of Piero, his cousin and rival.

The diaries of Sanuto prove that no event in Italian politics was long unknown at Venice. When the Venetians learnt that the Countess was sending her son to the relief of their enemies, they tried to terrorize her. They strengthened their battalions at Ravenna, and spread the rumour that Antonio Ordelaffi, the most dangerous enemy of the Riario, would be sent against her and her future son-in-law, the young Lord of Faenza. "But little heed pay I to this gossip," wrote Catherine, on June 6, to Ludovico il Moro. The Venetians had already sent Naldi and Ordelaffi to hinder the departure of Octavian. "But for all that," she wrote, "I do not desist from sending the Lord Octavian, my son, on his journey, both because I will not fail to my given word, and because I think but little of the coming of the man Antonio. . . . I do not think myself so lightly bound to these States that I need consider it much. Would to God I had more hope in other places where they know the government to be weak and have, perchance, laid deeper plans. . . . If without prejudice to her State she sent Octavian to learn soldiering with the Florentines, that was no reason why the Venetians should attack or insult her, and if even they so did, I have the spirit wherewith to defend myself." A few days later, she wrote that she had dispatched her son with her best soldiers to the service of the *Signori* of Florence. "I have provisioned the fortresses, and provided for the other needs of this State in such wise that at the first shot fired we can count not only upon the services of our own men, but on those of the Florentines who are on this side of the Alps."

Stern guard was kept at Forli within, as without. A wretched citizen was suspected of abetting Antonio Ordelaffi; he was promptly condemned to death by the Countess, and was soon afterwards seen hanging to the battlements. Catherine, sooner than break her word to the Florentines, had not hesitated to irritate the Venetians, but if she was daring, she was not foolhardy. Abandoned by Fracasso, her chief stay, without the help promised by Ludovic, alone and menaced on every side, she wrote her uncle: "War is not for women and children, like my sons."

Octavian, owing to his mother's passion for arms and military pomp, entered Florence with a suite which seemed worthy rather of a king than of a minor prince. He was received with great rejoicing in Florence, accompanied in state to San Giovanni, and twice reviewed his troops by request of the *Signori*, so great was their admiration of the pageant. Catherine continued from afar to direct these soldiers she had trained and exercised, and minutely regulated their administration. "Her Excellency Madonna desires that the lists be kept in the accustomed order, and that man and horse be catered for discreetly and moderately," runs a letter to Christofero Ricerboli, dated June 24. Catherine



OCTAVIANO RIARIO.
*Medal coined by Nicolò Fiorentino.*

sent her husband and Giovanni Corradino, castellane of Forli, to join Octavian in camp at Pisa, on whom, despite his poor capacity, fortune smiled under the guidance of these experienced warriors. Catherine, in the delight brought her by tidings of her son's first victory, struck the equestrian medal which represents him equipped as a captain-general.

But while Catherine triumphed as a sovereign and exulted as a mother, Giovanni Medici fell ill and returned to Forli. What would befall Octavian without him? One fear trod on the heels of another, and Catherine's short-lived happiness was drawing to its end. Her husband became rapidly worse,

and was sent by his physicians to San Piero in Bagno. After writing his wife as to a commercial agreement with a certain Maestro Ambrosio of Milan, he continues, "Your Ladyship will send me one or two of my black barets (*bérets*) to change when I perspire, and also two other double pinkish ones, large, hollow, and light, to wear the days I take my bath, and sufficient cloth of Lucca for two skull-caps; a little more of that wax for my head, and some of that hemp wadding to wear under the baret. . . . I have already bathed two days in the women's bath, and, thank God, up to now everything agrees with me; I hope to completely recover my wonted health. I commend myself to Your Ladyship with the Piovano (Fortunati), who to-day is better. . . . Written in my rooms at the Baths *die* 2 *Sett.*, 1498." On the eleventh he wrote again, instructing his wife how to write to him, and begging her to be advised in all things by Simone Ridolfi, without mention of his health. Suddenly he grew worse. Catherine, summoned by a courier, hastened to his side and found him dying, but still conscious. In the night of September 14 he expired in her arms. Bernardi relates that his brother Lorenzino conveyed the body to Florence, and on the following, which was a Saturday, "his beautiful wife, our Madonna, returned home." The deepest mourning was observed in her household and court, to the wonder of many of her subjects, to whom the marriage had remained a secret. "To my mind," adds the historian, "the affairs of the great are difficult to fathom."

Catherine's grief was profound. "The Florentines," says Machiavelli in the *Fragments*, "sent Andrea dei Pazzi to the Countess of Imola, partly to condole with her on the death of her husband, Giovanni dei Medici, partly to keep her well-disposed towards our republic. As they could not levy soldiers here, they sent her 5000 ducats to enable her to place 3000 foot in the company of Signor Fracassa, officer of the Duke of Milan, who was here at the time with a hundred men-at-arms and a hundred mounted archers."

"Stunned by mortal grief," wrote Lorenzo Bossi (Fra

Lauro) to Duke Ludovic on September 17, "I entreat Your Excellency to send some one immediately to the Madonna of Forli, for she is in danger, without any one to sustain her . . . and I know what I say." He had heard from the Venetian orators that the Signory of Venice was determined to profit by the grief which had overwhelmed Catherine, to demand passage for the soldiers they were sending to Tuscany through her dominions. The Venetians had reinforced their garrison at Faenza to coerce her, and the advice of Bentivoglio was to yield to their numbers and accede to their demands. But the Venetian Proveditore asked in vain for the right of way from Faenza to Florence; Catherine, once again a dauntless widow, decisively refused it to him.

In August of the following year, when the designs of Alexander VI. on the whole of Romagna were no longer secret, the Medici asked Catherine to provide for the safety of their little cousin and nephew, Giovanni, by entrusting him to their guardianship. Catherine replied that there was nothing but her child that she could refuse to the House of Medici. The Medici contended that she was not justified in exposing an innocent child to the ruin which menaced her, and that if she insisted on keeping him with her she must find sureties for his safety. To this Catherine acceded, and on August 14 the Medici arrived at Castrocaro, where they were met by Catherine, accompanied by Octavian, Luffo Numai, the notary Aspini, and several nobles of Forli. Ser Giacomo Aldobrandini of Florence had already drawn up a deed which conferred the guardianship of the infant Giovanni and his property on Catherine, who in return gave them personal securities; Octavian, *in solidum* with Luffo Numai, being sureties for 25,000 gold ducats. The Medici complained that the marriage of Catherine to Giovanni Popolano was still kept secret, there being nought in this alliance but what was honourable to her and the House of Medici. They argued that secrecy was no longer of any use to Catherine's policy, while it was prejudicial to the interests of the infant Giovanni. The Medici were becoming indignant at Catherine's hesitancy, when, moved by the thought of her child, she

consented to deposit in the public archives a document by which she declared herself the widow of Giovanni de' Medici. As a memorial of their marriage she struck a medal on which her portrait was surrounded by the inscription *Catharina Sfortia Medices.*

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE FLORENTINE ALLIANCE

CATHERINE, who despite her anxiety did not recall Octavian from the camp at Pisa, occupied her early widowhood in repairing the wall of Forli towards Ravenna—for which she lent the necessary funds to the commune—in drilling her soldiers and providing new arms and copious supply of ammunition. She levied 4000 troops for the Duke of Milan. The Venetians, who were being reinforced at Ravenna, threatened to deprive her of her State in favour of Antonio Ordelaffi and intimated to her to cease levying soldiers. Catherine, deaf to their threats, continued to levy soldiers for Milan and Tuscany.

Her manner of raising a levy was singular. Two citizens were deputed to make a census of able-bodied men and notify them to present themselves at the fort. Scarcely any one appeared. Catherine, infuriated, ordered her deputies to go, at the fifth hour of the night, to the houses of all those who had not appeared and to order them to present themselves at a stated hour at the fort, under penalty of the gallows. "Our Madonna caused six bombs to be fired," says Bernardi, "so that all our people might be informed." (October 4, 1498.) These rigorous measures had the effect of putting to flight the few who had already presented themselves—one alleged that his ignorance of warfare would make him an incumbrance to the army, another that he had a family and no mind to abandon it for the "fine eyes" and political intrigues of the

Countess, yet another that it was a great mistake for Forli to pit herself against Venice, which fed her commerce. It was therefore very difficult to find recruits, but at last they were obtained from the neighbouring castles.

Some Venetian troops having entered the territory of Forli, the Countess sent a protest to the Podestà of Ravenna, through her son Cæsar. True, the Riario were in the pay of Florence, but this had nothing to say to the politics of either State. Had Venice demanded their services in time, they would have given them on the same terms. The Podestà appeared convinced and replied courteously, yet the inroads were repeated. A sentinel was then posted on the tower of the commune who rang a bell at the approach of the enemy, its numbers being indicated by the strokes of the bell, which hung there from 1498 to 1788, when on its removal, the following inscription was found on its inner rim.

Sfortiades laetor Catharinae tempore facta
Quae populum vigilem reddo, et arma voco.

On the outer rim was :

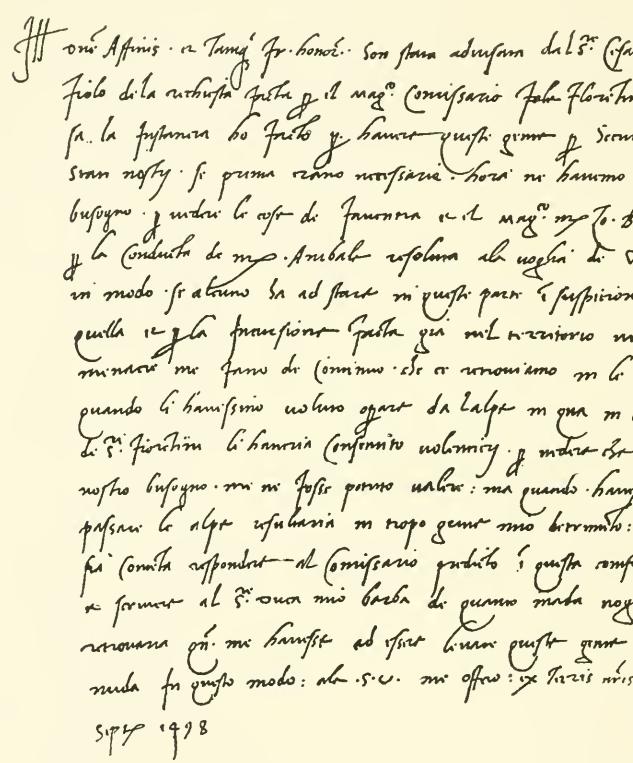
Opus Bernardini Gongonzolae MCCCCLXXXXVIII.

with the arms of the commune on one side and those of Catherine on the other. On October 24, a priest whose curiosity had led him to climb the tower of the Dome, perceived the enemy's troops, and tolled the bell. Armed citizens rushed to the Gate of Schiavonia, where they found Catherine, vigilant and self-possessed, who posted them along the city wall. The Venetians, seeing them so well defended, turned back and were pursued but not overtaken by Fracassa. Catherine then granted a safe-conduct to all exiles—except those condemned for rebellion—with the restoration of their confiscated property. They returned in great numbers and the Christmas festivities were more than usually joyous.

Unprotected against daily and increasing insults and menace . . . "If I be more timorous than is needful," she wrote the Duke of Milan, "Your Excellency must ascribe it to my being a woman and therefore of a fearsome nature."

Dangers, indeed, multiplied on every side. The numbers

of the Venetian troops had so augmented, that soon they would be all-powerful in Romagna. Not one horse had arrived of all those promised by Ludovic. "The not having sent two hundred men-at-arms in time, has caused us to lose Faenza," she wrote him; "may tardy provision against so



LETTER OF CATHERINE SFORZA, DATED SEPTEMBER 14, 1498.

great a need not give them so firm a hold that it cannot be undone. My affection dictates the freedom of my speech." Military cares engrossed her life, she rode the hills with Fracassa and with him planned the manner and defences for the war. "On our side, over here, we fail not to provide

as well as in us lies, and to-morrow I go with Jo. Gaspare (Fracassa) to Marradi, which is a step from the Florentines in Valdilamone, to see the country and fortify the passes where I may find it necessary, to encourage our men and to prove to others that we do not sleep." She sent messages everywhere and hoped for victory, but all depended on promptitude. "If," she wrote on the following day, "we do not provide speedily and well . . . the enemy will have its way."

Two days later, she wrote again. Her fears were justified, the Venetian army had poured down upon Romagna. "I grieve that my words have been disbelieved, as coming from a timorous woman." The Venetians had passed Valdilamone and were yet reinforcing at Ravenna. Words were of no avail. Troops must be sent at once.

At last Duke Ludovic awoke, stirred himself and dispatched the Count of Caiazzo, brother of Fracassa and almost his equal in war. The Duke wrote his niece that he had sent this captain to Imola, "and thus have appointed you and the aforesaid Count our Captains-general in those territories, trusting in the success which is (assured) by your courage and wisdom." The Duke's courier was met by one from the Countess on his way to summon Caiazzo, without further delay. "One hour was worth thousands." Catherine thenceforward shared the command and responsibilities of a war against Venice with the two most famous captains-general of her time.

Meantime the Orsini, who had entered the service of Venice, sent a former man-at-arms of the Riario to inform the Countess that the Venetians had determined to reinstate Piero de' Medici: they (the Orsini) would do nothing that could injure her and offered their mediation and negotiation in the attainment of any wish of hers. The Countess, ascribing their courtesy to gratitude for benefits received from her first husband, thanked them "with many loving words. She had nothing to say on the restoration of Piero: her son was in the Florentine service as a soldier. As such he did his duty, without interfering in other matters. If she sided with the Duke of Milan, it was because she was his

niece. She was grateful, but there was nothing that she wanted."

A letter from Catherine to Duke Ludovic, dated September 26, sheds some light on her relation to Fracassa.[1] In the society of this rugged soldier the fair Countess cannot have rejoiced. She had longed for his arrival and had received him as the angel of deliverance, yet, one morning, he had ridden away without saying why, unmoved by the tears and soft words of the lady he had been sent to obey and defend.

"Your Excellency knows how I sorrowed when he went away the first time. I have striven to honour and please him by doing, on my side, all that was possible . . . out of respect to Your Excellency, and to prove how acceptable is his presence to me here. Yet I have never succeeded in doing enough to satisfy him. . . ." If she spoke of helping the Florentines, Fracassa had always met her with difficulties. On the question of tactics, Catherine assures the Duke that she had with the utmost delicacy always "deferred to him, yet sometimes he had turned upon her as if she had presumed to give him orders." On that day in the presence of every one, he had "of his own accord opened a discussion as to whether or no he should help the Florentines." Catherine had replied that he must do as he thought best: he held his commission from the Duke and she was not the one to tell him to go or stay. She had then succeeded in changing the subject of conversation to forage, lodging, and some complaints that had arisen among the soldiers. The Countess expressed surprise that they should now make complaints which she had never heard when she had had soldiers from Milan in much greater numbers. "When? when? In whose time?" said Fracasso. The Countess replied: "In the time of Gian Piero of Bergamo and Count Borello:" "Then," continued Catherine, "he took the name of the Virgin Mary in vain and cursed St. Peter as if I had compared him to drunkards and cowards. I replied that I was not talking of himself, but was only saying that at that time there was a greater number

[1] Machiavelli and other historians write Fracassa. Catherine writes Fracasso.

of soldiers. He left me in anger and displeasure as if to make me understand that he was going away."

The Duke's reply is contained in his instructions to a certain Battistone, who was returning to Forli on September 22. "We regret the words and expressions used by the Signor Messer Gaspar (Fracassa), but as we have already told Her Ladyship, it is necessary to tolerate him, for his deeds are better than his words, therefore, we pray her, if he is to stay there, to bear with him . . . she will conquer him by courtesy."

The Venetians attempted to occupy Marradi in Romagna, but were thwarted in this design, by troops "sent there by the Duke of Milan, and, at his request, by Catherine Sforza, Lady of Forli," says Capponi in his *History of the Florentine Republic*. But now Fracassa, whose soldiers were deserting for want of pay, declared that he would abandon Marradi, unless the promised infantry were sent to him, and Catherine wrote her brother-in-law, Lorenzo Medici, that in this Fracassa was justified. She had written and rewritten to the Ten (di Balia) for money, but "had not yet seen anything but words . . . the enemy strengthens in these parts and ours diminish. And it would not appear that the Venetians have begun this dance to finish it so soon. . . . I am the only one menaced, for it appears that they consider themselves to have been greatly injured by what I have done to further your interests, and they add that I have robbed them of victory. . . . If the Ten do not intend to send the money, I do not care to pass for a fool with these people, whom I have kept together by good words. . . ." The Duke of Milan proceeds most cautiously against the Venetians, "but we have come to such a pass that we shall have to raise our masks. . . ." When others are so cautious, how much more does it behove her, who is so much weaker than they, to be circumspect! "But the last thing I will do is to forfeit these States, seeing that there be none who will give me others or any like them. . . . I know that you love your own Republic and believe that you do not hate me." Catherine concludes by appealing to him

to provide against their coming need. Fracassa was about to leave Modigliana: what would happen, if he did?

The Countess sat up at night going through the accounts, so that she might provide for the payment of his soldiers; she sent to beg him to remain, to accept this preliminary payment for the infantry until the Florentines decided whether or no they will contribute additional funds. "If he stays, provision, other than by words, will have to be made. An hour," she repeated, "is worth thousands." On the evening of the 18th (*hora VI. noctis*) she again wrote Lorenzo that "now the enemy was upon them, she trusted that there would be no further indecision. . . . Fracassa will persevere in his intention . . . he is not one to alter his mind." Count Ranuccio Farnese had arrived but had been unable to get word or deed from Fracassa. . . . "Had he been left alone, perhaps he would have behaved better." If possible, it would be well to keep him; his brother, Caiazzo, might have influenced him, but that he was in bed with a great fever: she now feared that Fracassa had some understanding with the Venetians at Ravenna; was anxiously awaiting money, which when it came she would not squander, but the arrears of pay were heavy. She had lent money to Octavian Manfredi, who was poor,[1] and whom she would like to reinstate at Faenza, to have some near on whom she could depend. She could no longer count on Astorre Manfredi, the poor boy who was to have been her son-in-law, now caught in the toils of the Venetians. "I do not feel obliged to give my daughter to that child, for his tender years and relationship to Bentivoglio would prevent his being of any comfort to me. . . . The Count of Caiazzo has asked for the hand (of Bianca) in marriage . . . there is the question of (the difference in) age, otherwise the reputation he has throughout Italy would make him acceptable to me. . . ." To the Duke, Catherine wrote asking him to consider this proposal and inform her of his opinion: "she would not do anything without his advice, and if the Count returned to the subject she must give him a decisive answer."

[1] Whom in 1495, Catherine and the Venetians had repulsed and pursued in defence of the rights of Astorre Manfredi.

At last, on October 20, 1498, 2000 ducats arrived from Florence, the more necessary "in that some persons I have detained here, on my word and faith, for which I would rather die than fail them," wrote Catherine to her uncle. "Pressing need to sweep the enemy from our house has necessitated more ample provision than you realize. . . . If you will lay aside your mask and tread less cautiously, making the requisite provision, be sure that victory will be yours." Bentivoglio had attempted to corrupt the captain of her archers, but the latter had proved himself a good soldier and loyal servitor. Was she, or not, justified in her distrust of him? The Ten (Dieci di Balia) had learnt that the enemy were about to pour down 3000 German and Swiss mercenaries on Romagna. "They," continued Catherine, on the 21st, "do everything promptly, and do not hesitate over much. Woe unto us if they are the victors. They will not be so gingerly as we. We must have more troops at once . . . it is time to have done with words, and with painted horses." To Lorenzo Medici, who had written encouraging her "to be of good courage, as she had ever been, and devise some high deed which would save them all," she replied that she "was more likely to feel the blow before the fear."[1] But at that moment the enemy had entered Bibbiena. How many times had she written to avert this calamity. . . .

While Catherine devoted herself to defending the Florentines, she was herself exposed to the greatest danger; the Venetians brought their camp to Villafranca, within two miles of her, and summoned Antonio Ordelaffi from Ravenna, thus threatening her both with open warfare and civic sedition. They stole cattle, some of which they consented to return on payment of ransom. "This is cowardly," wrote Catherine. "I would that our people had no more consideration for them than they show us. Why this consideration? I have had less in risking all that is mine." She had ever advised the people of Faenza "not to follow in the steps of others lest they draw down upon themselves both friends and enemies."

Her experience with Fracassa and others caused her to

[1] *Sum prima per sentire le botte che havere paura.*

write the Florentines that if they intended sending soldiers to her for winter quarters she would prefer "the small change" of men-at-arms, not *condottieri* nor captains-general.

On October 30, Catherine wrote Lorenzo—"After dismissing the cavalcade, I remained with Signor Fracassa and your commissioner. We went to the quarters of the Count of Caiazzo to discuss these expensive and burdensome winter quarters. I spoke my mind to them, telling them that while in words they affected to carry out my orders according to the commission they hold, in deed they are averse to any useful action. I was obliged to remind them that they have no muddle-head to deal with. I had suggested an attack on Brisighella, which would have been a certain victory—I know it—but they would have none of it. When the enemy had left Marradi and encamped on my territory, I advised them to come to Castrocaro, and harry the territory of Faenza: they did not choose to. I advised them to make some raids at Faenza and proved to them they could do so with impunity: they would not make them. Had we done any of these things, the enemy were not now either on my land or at Bibbiena, but would be employed in guarding their own. They would wish me to acknowledge that they are in the right, but that would neither be consistent with my nature nor with the importance of your States and mine. But if one differs from them in opinion or desire, they turn upon one in fury.

"I have become a laughing-stock here, and were it not for my interest in your glorious Republic, pray believe that I would not endure this conduct patiently. Picture to yourself the state of my mind, and if at times my letters betray despair, wonder not at it. Provision might have been made against the attacks of the enemy, which were all foreseen: they were not made; we might have lived in security: it has not been permitted to us; we might have prevented the enemy from injuring either you or ourselves: but despite our reminders, nothing has been done. . . . Enough to make the hardest head despair, much less me, who am but a woman."

"I have written my Lord Duke to send hither a confidential

person to investigate the truth, so that His Excellency may realize what is happening, for others whom I know to be only writing him what they please might gain more credence than I. . . . I will not have any Horse, and even if they wished it I would not lodge any of his nor theirs, for at home and abroad I am robbed by their men, and they will not listen to any complaint. See that when my son is sent to winter quarters he be sent to me here: he will at least have more affection and care for my subjects and yours. . . . I think from what has passed between us that they will give up the idea of making this their winter head-quarters and will, instead, all go to Castrocaro; for yesterday evening, we settled with Signor Fracasso and Andrea de' Pazzi that it should be so. I know not if they will change their minds; if they do we shall be guided by circumstances. The affairs of Casentino have not miscarried through me, neither will I cease to do all that is possible; but you too must stir yourselves . . . if you make a gallant effort, our side will win an early victory, but if you dally, you will sow a fever in your bowels that it will be hard to cure. Have a care to whom you entrust State matters, it is not enough for such men to be trusty. . . . You see how much inclined are these lords to free me of my enemies . . . they do not obey the Duke's commands to let the enemy understand . . . that any injury done to me is as an injury done to His Excellency. . . . If they shirk their duty in a question of words how can I expect deeds of them? . . .

"To all of which I call the attention of Your Magnificence, *quae bene valeat, Forli, vii* 30 *Oct.*, 1498, *hora XIII.*"

Catherine, who suffering for her zeal on behalf of the Florentines by menace and invasion from Venice, prayed and cried in vain; the Florentines, unmoved, did not come to her help, but no sooner had the enemy set foot on Tuscan soil than they awoke and turned to Catherine, of whom they asked "as many Foot and Light Horse as she could send to Casentino. . . ."

The Countess, indignant at the ingratitude and impudence of the Florentines, wrote the Duke complaining of their treatment, yet was too loyal an ally not to rob herself of

soldiers for them. "I send these our archers that the Signori may know us to be incapable of neglecting to do all we can for their comfort and satisfaction." . . . Yet she had written in another letter, "being without other soldiers, it would fare ill with us in case of sudden need." Her loyalty and high spirit made her a terrible enemy, whom the Venetians already regretted to have irritated and provoked. "Times were indeed bad," wrote Sanuto, "and the Madonna of Forli was sending 8000 mercenaries against us."

She still continued to regulate the expenses and discipline of her son's company at Pisa: to her were submitted all accounts and information and from her instructions were awaited. The new soldiers "have been levied by us and not by the Count Albertino (the commandant); We are their chief and others are but our ministers." After entering into the minutest details of daily expenditure, and promising the soldiers better remuneration in better times, she continues—"You will have everything looked into that comes from the camp, so that everything be forthcoming that had been confided to individuals; give orders for all the mules to be sent here as well as the *credenza* and linen for the use of the Lord my son." This iron discipline was a thorn in the side of her servants. "The accounts," wrote a certain Lionardo to the Piovano Fortunati, a canon of San Lorenzo, Catherine's agent and later her confessor, "the accounts will be, indeed are forthcoming; but they are all in a sheaf. Figure to yourself a field that hath been sown with wheat, barley, hay, beans, peas, lentils, etcetera . . . and in which everything has grown in a tangle: how can you keep each product separate?" He then discusses horses sent for by the Countess from Flanders and mentions a grey horse that was to be sent back to Forli.

## CHAPTER XXV

### ASSASSINS IN ROMAGNA

CATHERINE had always openly protected the Tiberti of Cesena in their quarrels with rival factionists. Of this family were Achille, a doughty captain of men-at-arms, and Polidoro, a loyal, intelligent man of agreeable manners, who, like Messer Giovanni da Casale, the worthy priest Fortunato, and many others, owing to the enthusiasm with which they served their Lady, were reputed to be her lovers. Lovers they were, devout but unrequited, whom Catherine alternately defended with all her might, entangled in the vicissitudes of her statecraft, or sacrificed to the cruel necessities of her wars.

In November 1498, the mission of asking the Pope and Cardinal Riario for a bishopric or rich benefice for Cæsar Riario, fell to the lot of Polidoro Tiberti. Catherine would have preferred to have moulded her second son on the pattern of his maternal ancestors; failing in this endeavour, she destined him for "the army of the Church," and sent her trusty Polidoro as a scout, to explore the Roman field. The Pope had had time to forget and forgive her refusal of Lucretia Borgia, who now as the wife of Alfonso of Aragon should feel a certain gratitude to those who had denied to her Octavian Riario. Tiberti wrote from Rome—

"Immediately on my arrival, I was received in audience by the Pope—with whom I stayed until the fourth hour of the night—with a warmth of cordiality that is beyond me to describe. . . . His Holiness questioned me at length about Your Ladyship: if you were as beautiful as ever, if you were

happy, how you governed your State, if the Castle of Forli was strong and well-provisioned, what money Your Excellency had, how many children ; to all of which I replied properly, much to the satisfaction of His Holiness, who praised Your Excellency's great understanding, giving me to understand how much he appreciated it. When I came to the subject of the Lord Cæsar, I said : ' Holy Father, Madonna places her hope in Your Holiness (for she has determined that the Lord Cæsar, because of his virtue and modesty, shall become a priest), believing that of Your clemency You will promote him to some ecclesiastical dignity, . . . although she doubts not the gratitude of Cardinal San Giorgio (Raphael Riario) for benefits received.' The Pope replied, turning to the Cardinal of Perugia : ' Therein is she justified,' . . . and altogether, I found His Holiness very well disposed towards Your Excellency and Your children, as I will verbally and more minutely relate to Your Excellency on my return, which I hope will be soon. . . ."

On leaving the Pope, Tiberti presented himself before Cardinal Riario, of whose courtesy and good intentions he assures the Countess, as well as of the writer's devotion " in life or death." Within the month Catherine was informed that her nephew, Cardinal Raphael Riario, renounced his rights in the archbishopric of Pisa in favour of Cæsar, so that she found herself, still young and in the prime of her classical and famous beauty, mother to a youthful archbishop. She sent him to Milan on a farewell visit to her uncle Ludovic, and in the month of May to Rome. On receiving the papal bull, Catherine, in public acknowledgment of her joy, opened the doors of their prison to six captives in the citadel.

Meanwhile Cæsar Riario, by command of his mother, who still regulated every step of the adolescent prelate, proceeded to his See at Pisa. On the door of his palace he quartered the arms of the Emperor of Germany with those of the Duke of Milan, those of Riario with the arms of the Sforza, while a third shield bore the arms of Cardinal Raphael, and a fourth those of Giovanni Medici.

The correspondence continued between Lorenzo Medici and Catherine, who was, however, losing patience with the Florentines. Her sentiments are revealed in a confidential letter to her agent, the Piovano Fortunati. . . . . "I am at last so sick of them that I will have no more to do with them; for I see that they have no respect for one who has given of her own for the benefit of that city, and who, having no obligation, yet has not hesitated to impoverish and endanger her State. They have given us an assignment of Alfonzo Strozzi for the loan, but nothing has come of it. This seems to me so simple a mode of dismissal, that I will wait for none other, neither shall it be thought (of me) that I am content to further wait and serve. . . ."

. . . . "Make my excuses to the Magnifico Lorenzo in that I can no longer endure this dishonourable treatment . . ." For him, personally, she expressed herself ever ready to run the same risks, but she could no longer expose herself to ruin for the sake of Florence. "All our soldiers have been paid their weight in gold and to the last carat," yet they (the Florentines) denied any obligation to her. "Let them find those who will do better for them than we . . . and we will live at peace and without loss; for it is much better for us to be mere spectators than spend our substance in vain and endanger our State. And pray believe that these are no idle words, for it is not in my nature to use many, but you will see their effects." He is instructed to speak clearly to Lorenzo, her brother-in-law, so that he may never complain that he has not been warned, and to leave immediately; she has need of him, and longs for his arrival; "neither will I that you remain there longer, for it would be an indignity to Us. . . ." The news of this dissension reached Venice, where it was hoped that Catherine might be won over to an alliance.

On the 9th of the following February Virginio Orsini arrived at Ravenna in command of the Venetian troops, the same Orsini who had been the friend, defender and companion of her youth. Fearing that, being on the other side, he would be obliged to attack her, she wrote, entreating Duke Ludovic to come to her assistance, otherwise she would be obliged to

save herself by throwing herself into the arms of the Venetians. She levied troops to meet Orsini, condemning the standard-bearers entrusted with the levy to a fine of ten ducats for every conscript they allowed to escape them. The peasants were to be armed and in readiness to enter the city in case of need ; several who failed to appear nearly died of their whippings. Simone Ridolfi, the friend of Giovanni Medici and husband of a sister of Giacomo Feo, was then appointed Governor of Imola. He levied and exercised conscripts with so much zeal that artisans and peasants, tired to death of drilling, reviewing and standing in the sun, were loud in recrimination against Ridolfi and Catherine. That did not move her, the times demanded many soldiers, and they must be had at any price ; lances and coats of mail were given to those who had none, and their price taken off the pay. Eight hundred breast-plates and 1000 cuirasses arrived from Milan . . . every movement being watched from Ravenna and reported to Venice.

While the Florentines exasperated Catherine, at heart she was still devoted to Florence and Casa Medici. She declared that she could no longer endure them and was obliged to turn her back upon them, yet was the first to resent any injury done to them, to burn with the desire of avenging it, and to devise means and opportunity. Who touched the honour of the Republic, touched hers. They had lost Bibbiena to Venetians to whom Ramberto of Sogliano (of a younger branch of the Malatesta) had given right of way. Things had gone so well till then. Paolo Vitelli, under whom the Florentines had taken Librafratta, and the besieged Pisans were almost at his mercy, for the Apennines were closed to the army of their allies, the Venetians. The Duke of Milan would not suffer them to pass through Genoa, nor the Republic of Lucca through Ferrara and Modena, nor Bentivoglio through the mountainous passages of Bologna, while the fortresses and archers of Catherine Sforza blocked the Apennines of Romagna and confined the Venetians to the Valley of the Po. Then it was that Ramberto Sogliano had opened to them the gates of his castle on the confines of

Urbino and Casentino, and the Venetians, under Bartolomo d'Alviano, had pushed on to Camaldoli in a single night. The monks, who were singing matins, thought they recognized in the Venetian leader St. Romuald, their founder, and the convent was soon taken by the enemy. Thence, d'Alviano sent an order to the Florentine garrison at Bibbiena, purporting to come from the Ten, to prepare lodging for fifty of Vitelli's Horse, and in the guise of a Florentine captain, rode into Bibbiena with a hundred men-at-arms, followed by the bulk of the Venetian army.

The Florentines were in despair, but they did nothing. Catherine, who alone persisted in her intent to punish Ramberto for opening the gates of Tuscany to the Venetians, wrote :

"It would please me mightily if we could besiege this Count of Sogliano, to convince him of the mistake he has made . . . it would be a small enterprise to deprive him of one of his castles . . . for indeed the enemy's troops are all on the other side of the Alps." This was on December 2, 1498. . . . On January 15, 1499, she wrote again to Lorenzo de' Medici—"Although little heed has or will be paid to words of mine, either because they have no weight, or because of internal dissension in your city, I will not cease from caring for what is born of my love to your Republic and the similarity of our positions. If there be no result, neither will there be remorse on my side for having failed in what I hold to be my duty. I make much difference in that which I do, according for whom it is done. . . . I intimated some days past that the Count of Sogliano, having behaved to you as he has, it would be well to bring him to his senses. . . . Had the said Count his deserts, he would have already lost three or four castles. . . . Remember that delay means danger and many ills. . . ."

They had intended that Andrea de' Pazzi should take the offender by surprise, but the Florentine commissioner had been detained by a slight indisposition, and the plan had leaked out. Sanuto mentions that Sogliano had written Nicolò Venier that the Countess was trying to "get him in her hands,

to avenge her nicce," [1] and entreated the Venetians to send him four hundred Foot for his protection. He was thus enabled to keep at bay the troops sent against him by Catherine, under Naldi, Tiberti and Octavian Manfredi, as Catherine had foretold, and he shortly afterwards fled to Ravenna, where he sheltered himself from her displeasure in the shadow of St. Mark. Meanwhile, Octavian Riario had gone to his uncle at Milan.

In the following February Corbizzo Corbizi, a citizen of Castrocaro, of ancient Florentine lineage, was returning from Forli, whither he had been summoned by Catherine, to Castrocaro, when he was set upon and brutally murdered by four assassins. The true motive of this assassination was never divulged, but it was rumoured that Corbizi had had a hand in the death of the father of one of his assailants. The Venetian Sanuto accuses Catherine of this murder. "Misier Corbize (*sic*) had held Castrocaro for Zuam di Medici, who was husband to that Madonna, and had lent money to the said Madonna. Now she would fain have held Castrocaro, but to this he, who now is dead at the hand of the archers of Madonna, would not consent, but kept it for the Florentines. It is thought that the Florentines will avenge him."

But the truth was that in Corbizi, whose influence was predominant at Castrocaro, Catherine lost and lamented a friend and trusty counsellor, and grieved the more because he had met his death on a journey undertaken in her service. She published two edicts, one of which forbade the use of arms for purposes of private vengeance, and referred those who held themselves aggrieved to public justice, which would punish the guilty and compensate the injured. Another was against the arbitrary decisions of public officials, who were forbidden henceforward to be partial in their judgments. Favour and privilege were to be things of the past.

The suspicions of Machiavelli, who passed through Castrocaro in the following July, fell upon Dionisio Naldi of Brisighella, captain of Catherine's archers. In the first of a

[1] Catherine's resentment appears to have been complicated by a private grievance.

series of letters written during his legation to Catherine Sforza, he informs the Signori that he thinks a feud is imminent between the followers of Naldi and those of the late Corbizo. "Some envy," he writes, "is at work, for every one would like to inherit his (Corbizo's) reputation, and unless this humour be inflamed by those who might use it for their own ends, its effects will not be bad. But great suspicion prevails that this Naldi may commit some outrage, with the sanction of Madonna." In another letter he writes—"To-morrow I shall return to Castrocaro to see if I can do something for the protection of those of Corbizo against Dionisio Naldi and his partisans, in which Madonna cordially offers to co-operate." Catherine's archers were implicated, but as she was an ally of the Florentines, the men of Castrocaro could neither quarrel with her nor trust her. It is possible that Naldi or his party employed some of these archers to murder Corbizo. Catherine employed Naldi to uphold her influence in those parts, whence the Venetian story that she was the instigator of the assassination.

The murder of Corbizo was followed by that of Octavian Manfredi, a young man of conspicuous beauty, who had spent that winter at Forli as the inseparable companion of Octavian Riario, with whom he had served in the Florentine army. Catherine had openly declared her interest in him; wearied of the childish Astorre, who was now completely under the thumb of the Venetians, she had proposed to the Florentines to depose him in favour of his cousin, Octavian. When he was ordered to winter quarters at Faenza, Catherine had been offended and displeased. "Why remove him?" she had written. "Is it to annoy me, because I am fond of him? If his soldiers must go, there is no reason why his person and his archers should not stay here." She had written Lorenzo Medici that nothing could be more agreeable to her. Octavian was poor, but so delicately high-minded, that although he accepted from the Riario the hospitality of the citadel, he refused to burden his hosts with his maintenance and that of

his suite. As he had nothing but his pay, he decided on going to Florence to obtain payment of money due to him, and on returning to live with his friends in easier circumstances. From this project the Countess and the captain of her archers, that same Dionisio Naldi, of whom mention has been made, sought to dissuade him by every means in their power. Manfredi was not to be dissuaded, and still concealing the real reason of his departure (which was that he was penniless), borrowed sixty ducats of Luffo Numai, and having, from motives of economy, refused the escort which Catherine had pressed on him, on April 13 rode towards Florence, followed by only six men. At Castrocaro he refused renewed offers of adequate escort, and rode on through the Apennines until, when night had set in, he dismounted at an inn that had once formed part of a convent of the Benedictines. At dawn he resumed his journey, and within two miles of the inn was fallen upon by some thirty men led by a certain Galeotto de' Bosi, who had walked all the night by the light of their lanterns to lie in wait for their victim. He fell, bleeding from thirteen mortal wounds. The worthy Canon Fortunati received his last sigh, and by the time his other travelling companions had arrived, he was a corpse, which was borne by enemies and friends to the church of San Benedetto.

This cruel death was universally lamented. Catherine demanded his body of the Abbot of San Benedetto, and four Black Flagellants, followed by an ample escort, conveyed it to Castrocaro, where they were met by the whole of the confraternity who bore it in procession to Forli. On April 18 Catherine caused obsequies to be celebrated in the church of the monks of Valverde, and on the following morning the body was brought to the citadel and thence, with solemn pomp, to the church of San Girolamo, where it was buried under the sepulchre of Barbara Manfredi, his aunt and the unhappy wife of Piero Ordelaffi, erstwhile Lord of Forli. The people of Forli were moved to pity and sorrow, and on the following day Catherine ordered a hundred masses for the repose of the soul of Octavian.

But it was not in her nature to limit itself to prayers and tears ; her strong soul was bent on vengeance. She soon discovered that a certain Galeotto de Bosi of Faenza, who dreaded the advent of Octavian Manfredi, had determined to surprise and remove him. Masked, disguised, hidden in the woods, and lying in wait in inns, Catherine's myrmidons and archers were soon on the trail of Galeotto. Whether they killed or spared him does not transpire ; we only read that the homicide's right hand was presented to Catherine as a trophy.

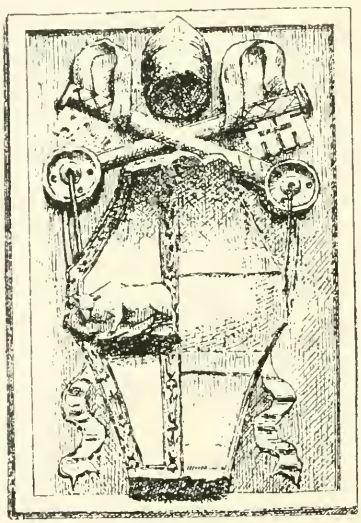
Catherine, who did not recoil from tyranny when she found it expedient, had, on becoming suspicious of the power and popularity of the Sassatelli of Imola, sought to alienate and weaken them. But Pensiero Sassatelli had behaved with such remarkable prudence that she had neither succeeded in exiling him nor lessening his popularity. At last she determined to bestow on him a guide who would rule and watch over him as she wished, and to this end offered him in marriage, through Giovanni of Castrocaro, a gentlewoman "in whom she had every confidence."

Sassatelli, in alarm, saved himself by the pretext that he intended to become a priest, but Catherine, to whom words did not suffice, exacted from him a document which still exists, in which, after thanking the Countess for the bride she had destined for him, he declared that he would wed no woman because he was determined to become a priest, and gave a security on all his property that not only would he never marry but that he would not even ask permission from the Countess to do so. Pensiero ultimately married, a few months before Catherine's death, a certain Leona Sacchi, of Ravenna, by whom he had no issue.

Related to the Sassatelli and their equals in rank and power were the Vaini of Imola. The imprisonment of Enea Vaini had given rise to correspondence between Catherine and the Duke of Ferrara, in the heat of which she remarked that "all Italy" would approve of what Enea had driven her

to do in self-defence. "I learn," wrote Francesco Trachedini to the Duke of Milan in 1492, "that Bendetto Aldrovandi . . . induced Enea to present himself to the Illustrious Countess by means of a safe-conduct which stipulated that if he gave security he should be at liberty. . . . Enea agreed to this, and offered it in Imola and elsewhere. But it appears that the Countess would have it in Venice in a sum of three or four thousand ducats. But as Enea cannot find any one who will lend him so much, he finds himself in honourable custody in a room in the Citadel of Forli." He escaped with his brother Domenico, and in 1499 they came to Massa Lombarda, which was then occupied by the Venetians.

According to Cerchiari[1] "Catherine nourished such bitterness and suspicion of those two fugitives who were now on territory occupied by her enemies that she recalled them, under safe-conduct, to establish their innocence, and throwing aside her mask on their return, had them seized and beheaded in the fort. . . ."



ARMS OF POPE ALEXANDER VI.

A certain Antonio Baldraccani was that year secretary to the Countess. He had been often sent on missions to the Duke at Milan, but as, on returning from his last journey, he was attacked by some assassins of Faenza, Catherine, who would not expose him to further danger, wrote the Duke to send Messer Giovanni da Casale "secretly" to Forli, whom on many occasions she had found most faithful to the Duke and devoted to herself. This was the same Giovanni of Casale who played such an important part in all Catherine's

[1] *Storia d'Imola*, p. 55.

affairs and of whom it was said that he was her lover, and later that he had betrayed her and the fort to Valentino. But these rumours were founded on deceptive and contradictory appearances. The fact was that Catherine needed a man in whom she had the utmost confidence, whom she could send to inform the Duke of Milan of all she had done for Florence and how she had been requited.

# CHAPTER XXVI

## THE LEGATION OF MACHIAVELLI[1]

"RECALL to the Signori," wrote the Countess to her faithful Fortunati, "that Our faith and service deserved better requital. . . ." All Italy was witness that for their sakes she has staked her all. . . . Although she owed them nothing, no allied prince, nor *condottiere* had done for them what she had done, and she had been met with indifference and despicable, cruel ingratitude. Possibly the Signori were not to blame so much as . . . vile, malevolent insinuations, yet this was how matters stood. She had been taught by this experience to attend to her own business . . . and times might come when the Florentines would need her more than they had done. "It is not our wont to call attention to benefits We have conferred, but in this case, Our sorrow lends freedom to our speech." Thus wrote Catherine on June 28, 1499,[2] and soon afterwards came signs of the coming storm.

Cæsar Borgia, Duke of Valentino, was gradually attaining to higher power; he ruled the Pope, and disposed of the treasures of the Church. He had determined to build his kingdom in Romagna, which, as usual, lent itself easily to every change. The life of Ludovico il Moro, Catherine's uncle, was held to be a precarious one, and his throne was

[1] The surname of Machiavelli is derived from *Malus clavellus*, and is written with one c.

[2] The Florentine year began on March 25, *ab incarnatione*. For instance, the days from January 10 to March 24, 1498, all belong to 1499, new style. This computation was reformed in 1750, when the new year counted from the first of January.

endangered by the King of France. Catherine, fearing to find herself isolated and defenceless against Borgia and the King of France, felt that at any cost she must resume her alliance with Florence, the only State that was then allied to France. It appeared to her that, under these circumstances, Borgia would not attempt to attack her, neither would the French king suffer injury to the friend of his allies.

But she was on the worst possible terms with Florence. The contract with Octavian had been for one year, with the option of extending it to two,[1] with four months' notice. And the Florentines had, at the prescribed time, invited Octavian to remain. But he, imprudent, inconsiderate, and ignorant of the politics of Italy, had refused, by a legal act, and on December 30, 1498, had declared to the Ten that he would no longer serve the Republic, because the terms of the contract had not been adhered to.

His refusal was confirmed by his mother, and how grievous had been the complaints and recriminations that had reached her from Florence! How could she now approach them? But her need was pressing, supreme . . . the phantom of Cæsar Borgia, the Pope's master, in search of a State, left her no peace. The wily Catherine even then found means to offer her armed and friendly hand to the Republic. The pretext was a natural one: she wrote the Signori that her uncle, the Duke of Milan, had inquired whether, in case of need, she would send him fifty men-at-arms and as many archers, to help him to resist the French invasion. But determined as she was not to shirk the obligations of her contract with Florence, she had not been able to reply to him. It was for the Florentines to decide whether services rendered by her to their State entitled Octavian to stay with them for the optional year and to reply to her inquiry without delay, that she, in turn, might reply to the Duke. She could not think that the Republic would ignore the devotion with which she had served it. The same courier carried two other letters written with no less warmth, one for Lorenzo de' Medici, the other for Fortunati, begging for "an early and decisive reply."

[1] This option was called *beneplacito*.

The Florentines understood the game, in which the first move had been made with so much tact that they might accept her terms without loss of dignity. Florence was the friend of France, by whom the Duke of Milan was menaced. The Countess, allied to Florence, and niece to the Duke, asked in whose defence she should co-operate; if allowed to side with the Duke she would be opposed to Florence. For now the partners had changed hands, and the Duke who had been their ally against the Venetians was now an enemy. It became vital to them to detach from him the Lady of Forli, and to conciliate her by the expression of due gratitude for the preference she had shown them. A letter from Fortunati, dated July 11, announces that Nicolò Machiavelli would be sent to treat with her.

"I have been with the Signori," wrote Fortunati, "to learn whom they would send, and when. They tell me that Nicolò Machiavelli, a learned young Florentine noble, secretary to my Lords the Ten, is to leave with me at once; to which I replied, that to that I could not agree, holding as I do, Your Excellency's commission not to leave this, without Your Ladyship's permission. They raised the devil over it, so that I replied—'so tardy had they been in deliberating that I knew not how to appear before Your Excellency.' They replied that, if their terms do not prove acceptable, they will satisfy Your Ladyship at any cost, and that they are determined that this friendship shall never wane, and therefore, he must go, in any case. I replied that I would write as their Lordships wished, and that is what I am doing. I think that he (Machiavelli) will leave on Monday and stay with Your Excellency for ten days, or indeed until you have come to an understanding. . . . There is no doubt that the Signori intend to give satisfaction to Your Ladyship . . . and they are now preoccupied by what can best serve and comfort You; none can say otherwise, even if then they do their worst in deed or word. True it is that the funds of this city are in a parlous state, having been incurred for so many years that they overtax its strength; which is the reason why they try to reduce their expenses with Your Excellency.

And no sooner have they taken Pisa than they will free themselves of many of their *condottieri*, retaining (they say) the services of Your Excellency, and requiting You for services rendered and injuries endured. . . . Be therefore not surprised if Machiavelli begins by offering Your Ladyship ten thousand ducats; he being intrusted to do all he can to win You over for a small sum: not that they would take advantage of You, but the better to be able to recognize and cumulate benefits received from Your Ladyship. Ask for what you will, and be sure that it will be granted."

The Instructions received by Machiavelli, July 11, 1499, and included in his published works, beginning, "*Andrai ad Furli, o dove intendessi trovarsi quella illustrissima Madonna*," tally with the contents of Fortunati's letter. He was to submit to Catherine that the Florentines were under no obligation to confirm the re-engagement of Octavian, inasmuch as the latter had refused his consent to it: besides, Catherine herself had replied to the Duke of Milan, who advised her to leave her son in the Florentine service, that "On no account would she give her consent, she had been too ill repaid . . . Therefore if Her Excellency had other views, the Republic must be content to abide by her convenience. . . ." And having pointed out that neither Octavian nor the Countess had chosen to remain in the Florentine service, "immediately wilt add," continued the Instructions, "that despite all that has passed, seeing her desire, and because of our obligations to her, and to satisfy her so far as the times permit, and to prove our gratitude for the good deeds done to this city by her, we have resolved to accord this re-engagement to Their Excellencies." The pay of 15,000 ducats was reduced to 10,000, but the Florentines conceded all they could . . . "in the hope of better things, when the city should be restored to its normal state. . ." He was further instructed to leave Catherine "no cause of complaint . . ;" if, burdened by so many expenses, their payments were sometimes deferred, he was to tender such excuses as would be "appreciated and accepted by Her Excellency."

On July 16, Catherine gave her first audience to Machiavelli, "there being present," wrote the envoy to the Florentine Signori, "only Messer Giovanni da Casale, agent for the Duke of Milan, because the Lord Octavian, her son, was absent at Forlimpopoli. . . . I exposed the object of the Commission I hold from Your Lordships, using such expressions as best express the desire of Your Lordships that the times would permit You to adequately prove the esteem with which you regard those who, in Your need, have loyally served You without respect of risk to themselves, as had Her Excellency. . . although there had been some dispute with her agents as to Your obligation in relation to the *beneplacito* . . . praying her to add to past favours that of believing that she had not served an ungrateful Government. . ."

To this respectfully prepared discourse, Catherine replied impulsively that, "in all times the words of Your Lordships had satisfied her, while Your deeds, inadequate to her deserts, had displeased her. . . . But in the hope expressed by Your Lordships, she concurred without caring to discuss Your obligation with regard to the *beneplacito*. She would, however, take time to consider Your request, for it seemed to her reasonable not to decide hastily on what Your Lordships, with commendable prudence, had discussed and considered for a considerable time. . . ."

"On the following day," wrote Machiavelli, "about the sixteenth hour, Messer Antonio Baldraccani, Her Ladyship's First Secretary, visited me," to inform him that the Duke of Milan had that day invited Octavian to enter his service, and that five or six days back he had asked the Countess for a hundred soldiers. The secretary added that "Her Ladyship, Madonna, was doubtful which side to espouse, not seeing how she could prefer the Florentines to the Duke of Milan, nor what excuse she could make for refusing conditions so honourable and accepting Yours, which are less so: besides being bound to that prince by ties of blood and innumerable benefits: for these reasons she was unsettled, and could not give a decided answer. . . ." "Baldraccani gave me to understand that I had better inform Your Lordships that Madonna

would not decide for some time, promising to repeat to Her Excellency all that I had replied, adding that I should have every opportunity of saying the same things to her personally. . . . Yesterday I asked the Illustrious Madonna for bombs and saltpetre, on behalf of Your Lordships: she replied that she had none but a great dearth thereof, for her own use. . . . On local affairs I cannot presume to write much, because of the short time I have spent here; yet I gather from persons at Court and citizens of Your Lordships, that Her Ladyship could not be more attached than she is to the Republic."

On the 18th, Machiavelli wrote—"Your Excellencies having desired me to again apply to Madonna, for men and powder, I immediately presented myself to Her Excellency and again conveyed your wishes to her. She replied that she had no saltpetre and was short of powder, but sooner than disoblige you, she would permit Lionardo Strozzi to dispose of ten of the twenty pounds of saltpetre which he had contracted for her use at Pesaro to Your Lordships, and she ordered Risorboli to write the said Lionardo to that effect. Although I did all in my power to induce Her Excellency to accede to Your other requests, I could not obtain more from her. . . . With regard to Infantry, Her Excellency said she was willing to give her men authority to take service under Your Lordships, but that she had not the power to make them move without money. . . . Therefore if Your Lordships require them and will send 500 ducats, at the rate of a ducat each, she will find means of sending you picked men, well-armed and faithful, and she believes that they might be at Pisa, fifteen days from to-day. . . . This morning when I had communicated the contents of Your Lordships' letter to the Illustrious Madonna, she, without waiting for any comment from me, said: 'This is good news, for this morning I see that your Signori have made up their mind to action, since they are levying soldiers: for which I commend them, and am as pleased as I was ill-pleased by their former tardiness, when it seemed to me that they were losing invaluable (irrecoverable) time.' I warmly thanked Her Ladyship, demonstrating that such tardiness had been generated by necessity: to which Her Excellency agreed,

adding that she would her State were so situated that she could enlist all her soldiers and subjects in Your service, for then would she prove to the whole world that naught but the affection and faith she bears Your Lordships had made her Your partisan, but she would fain be better understood, with due regard to her honour, which she holds higher than any other thing. This she judged even of more importance to Your Lordships than herself, inasmuch as it would serve as an example to Your other adherents of Your gratitude for service rendered." "I did not fail," continues Machiavelli, "to reply as I should, yet was forced to the conclusion that words are not made to satisfy her, unless they be partly corroborated by deeds. And I really believe that if Your Lordships either pay something on account of past services or concede a little more in the matter of the new contract, that You will maintain her friendship. More affection for our city she could not have, of which I see most evident signs . . . .

"P.S.—There has come to me a secretary of Madonna, to inform me, on behalf of Her Ladyship, that there be two ways of levying soldiers in her dominions. Fifteen hundred of them, ready armed, whom she keeps for her own needs, and whom she would not send to Your Lordships without first paying to them, herself, a month's pay, whether or no they serve the whole month . . . . to each man eighteen lire, so if Your Lordships would have any of these, You would have to send 1500 ducats for 500 men. . . . She has other infantry accustomed to serve as mercenaries, but they are not bound by contract to her. These you can levy *pro arbitrio*, their terms being a matter of arrangement between You and them. . . ."

On the 24th he wrote—". . . I think that to content Madonna, it were needful to guarantee her reimbursement for past services, this being matter of grave anxiety to her, and besides, increase the pay for this year to 1200 florins. In my poor opinion, Her Excellency has throughout behaved honourably, never having so much as hinted that she would accept less than is offered her by the Duke of Milan; there-

fore it is difficult to gauge her mind as to whether she be more affected towards Milan or Your Republic.

"*Primum,* I see her Court full of Florentines, in whose hands her State appears to be; besides I find her naturally inclined towards this city, in which she would fain be popular. Of this there are abundant signs, for she has a son by Giovanni dei Medici, and hopes to have the use of his revenues, being daily on the point of assuming his guardianship. . . . *Ulterius,* and what is more important, she sees the Duke of Milan assailed by the King, and knows not how far she may be safe in joining issues with him in the present condition of affairs, in which Her Ladyship is well versed: all of which reasons strengthen my opinion that she is going to accept our more frugal conditions.

" On the other hand, I see in attendance on Her Ladyship, Messer Giovanni da Casale, agent here for the Duke of Milan, held in great esteem and wielding great influence, which is of great moment and might have great effect on a mind in doubt.

"And in truth, were it not for the intervention of this fear of the King of France, I think that in the pass to which things have come, she would have left you, especially as there would have been no breach, you being on terms of friendship with the Duke of Milan. I have ventured on this discussion in the belief that Your Lordships can prevent this happening by coming to a speedy decision; and this Her Ladyship, who is daily persecuted by the Duke, eagerly awaits. Yesterday, there was a review of five hundred Foot, whom Madonna is sending, under Dionigi Naldi, to the Duke of Milan: two days ago fifty mounted archers were inspected prior to their departure with one of the Duke's secretaries, who came here for the purpose, and to pay them.

"I think Your Lordships must have altered your minds with regard to the Foot soldiers you intended taking from Madonna, which is the best thing You can do, if You can do better elsewhere; but if Your Lordships are in need of them, these would be good, faithful men, well-trained and promptly despatched, (that is to say) if you send one month's pay."

After receiving fresh instructions from Florence, Machiavelli, on July 23, wrote as follows:

"I presented myself before Her Excellency, Madonna, and in the choicest words that occurred to me I delivered myself of Your Lordships' instructions as to offers from Milan, and with regard to the alternative You offer her, giving Her Excellency to understand that You would not have her sacrifice aught that can redound to her well-being, honour and convenience. . . . Her Excellency replied that she expected no less from Your Lordships, adding that her only trouble in this case came from the fear of incurring what seemed to her disloyalty and failing in the respect she owed her uncle. Yet, when she had arrived at an ultimate understanding with Your Lordships, she would come to a resolution and find the means of conquering every obstacle in her way. To which, having made suitable reply and said a few words as to Your Lordships' letter of the 19th on injuries done to Your subjects, I left at once, praying Her Excellency to hasten her decision."

The words "*mi partii subito*" would indicate an abrupt termination of this interview, and, in fact, the Countess sent Baldraccani to Machiavelli on the following day to convey her excuses for having curtailed the audience and explain the reason of her apparent curtness.

"To-day," wrote the Florentine envoy, "Baldraccani has been with me, and having . . . explained to me that why Madonna had not verbally opened her whole mind to me (yesterday), was on account of Her Ladyship's indisposition and great anxiety due to the illness of Ludovico,[1] her son by Giovanni dei Medici; he proceeded to assure me on behalf of Her Excellency, how glad she was, *nullo habitu respectu*, to be once more on terms of cordial friendship with Your Lordships, in whom henceforward she would put her trust, accepting the *beneplacito* in time of peace on the terms lately offered by You of twelve thousand ducats.

"But that she may be herein justified in the eyes of others,

[1] Giovanni dalle Bande Nere, then about a year old, christened Ludovico after the Duke of Milan, but called Giovanni from the time of his father's death.

and for the honour and reputation of her State, Her Excellency desires that Your Lordships shall bind Yourselves to the defence, protection and maintenance of her State. Albeit Her Excellency does not doubt You would do so much without any sort of agreement, *tamen* this agreement will be to her an infinite cause of satisfaction and content, bringing great honour to Her Excellency, without prejudice to Your Lordships.

"*Ulterius*, Her Excellency witnessed an assignment, if not for all, of part of the arrears of pay which she can use for urgent present necessities . . . of the importance of which I am charged to acquaint Your Lordships." Machiavelli replied to Catherine's secretary "in the most loving words of which he was master," that experience would but add to the good opinion vouchsafed by the Countess to the Republic. With regard to the agreement for defending her State, that was superfluous; it was, besides, outside the domain of his commission; would the Countess, therefore, accept the *beneplacito* from him, and write her instructions on other matters, to her agent in Florence?

Baldraccani replied that Her Excellency preferred to settle everything at the same time, and insisted on Machiavelli's writing to Florence for instructions.

"Yesterday," continued Macchiavelli, "Her Excellency deigned to make every excuse to me when I tendered, on behalf of Your Lordships, a complaint of the outrage committed by her archers on Your subjects at Salutare; informing me that she had sent them to the harvest of a certain Carlo de Buosi (Galeotto de Bosi), on property lying in her dominions, the said Carlo having lately been put to death by Dionisio Naldi in revenge for the Lord Octavian (Manfredi, who had been waylaid and killed by Bosi on his way to Florence). These peasants had told them (the archers), that if they gathered the harvest they would be cut to pieces, and said other offensive words, so that they were goaded into reprisals. Thereat she was profoundly grieved, in proof of which she commanded that the first of these archers who retaliated be immediately deprived of his arms and discharged . . .

"P.S.—To-morrow, fifty mounted archers, hired by the Duke, will leave for Milan."

The Florentines thought, by accepting Catherine's offers, to rob the Duke of Milan, who was opposed to their friend, the King of France, of an ally; but pending an agreement with them, Catherine continued to send reinforcements to Milan, to prove her utility as a friend, and for the sake of obtaining better terms from them. On the 23rd, Machiavelli, believing that he had succeeded in his mission, wrote that "on the morrow (he) hoped to obtain the signature of the Illustrious Madonna to the *beneplacito*, according to Your latest instructions, and besides *etiam* arrange the affairs of Your subjects with Her Excellency to Your Lordships' satisfaction. I may not add more, for the courier is in a hurry to leave."

On the 24th, he wrote—"After I had written to You and despatched Ardingo, I received a visit from Messer Giovanni da Casale (agent to the Duke of Milan), who informed me that I need not have written, inasmuch as Her Excellency was content to ask no bond of Your Lordships, being assured You would not otherwise behave in her need than she had done in Yours, and that to-day the *beneplacito* would be signed. Therefore, as I believed that this was what would happen, and the Piovano di Cascina (the Piovano or *Curé* Fortunati) was writing to Lorenzo di Pier Francesco (brother-in-law to Catherine), I wrote to that effect by the same courier to Your Lordships, in the belief that everything was settled. This morning, on finding myself with the said Messer Giovanni, in the presence of Madonna, Her Excellency told me that overnight it had occurred to her that it would be more consistent with her honour if You declared Yourselves bound to defend her State, according to her wishes as expressed in the first instance by her chancellor (First Secretary Baldraccani), which she desired me to communicate to You: if the tenor of the message I had received through Messer Giovanni ran otherwise, I must not wonder thereat, for the longer things are discussed, the clearer is the understanding arrived at.

"When I heard of this change I could not help showing what I felt, nor could I restrain my words and gestures from betraying my displeasure, and I added that Your Lordships would be equally surprised, I having already written that Her Excellency retracted every exception. . . ."

But the Countess was unmoved by the envoy's anger—"And I, being unable to obtain any further concession from Her Ladyship, am constrained to write You as above." The Countess dismissed Machiavelli courteously, promising to do all in her power for the welfare of Florentine subjects in Romagna, and although the young envoy found more than his match in the woman he had failed to circumvent, his mission had resulted in a renewal of friendly relations without increasing the expenses of the Government he served. A letter from Biagio Bonaccorsi, Chancellor to the Ten, to his "Charissimo Nicolò," testifies to his chief's warm approval of Machiavelli's maiden effort in diplomacy. . . . "To my mind, your execution of the Commission confided to you is greatly to your honour, in which I have and continue to take the greatest pleasure, so that all may know there be (at least) one other, who albeit less experienced, is nowise inferior to Ser Antonio . . . who thought so much of himself. . . . Go on as you have begun, for up to now, you have been a credit to us. I would, above all things . . . a portrait of Madonna . . . if you can send me one make it into a roll so that the creases may not spoil it. And at present can think of nothing else than to commend myself and offer my services to you. . . . *Bene valete. Ex. Palatio, die* XVIIII. *Juli* MCCCCLXXXVIIII."

*Servitor Blasius Bona : Cancel.*

Tomasini, in his *Life and Works of Nicolò Machiavelli in Relation to Machiavellism*, appeals to the reader's imagination by a mental reconstruction of those long-vanished halls that witnessed the interviews of Catherine Sforza and Nicolò Machiavelli. . . . "Catherine," he says, had "demolished that portion of the citadel that had witnessed her temporary humiliation at the hands of revolutionaries, so that she might blot out the memory of its shame: and, on the highest point of those bulwarks, which were held to be impregnable, had

built her new and superb dwelling. She had named it 'Paradise,' from the beauty and dainty architecture of its lofty rooms, adorned by noble paintings and resplendent with gilded and carved ceilings on which were emblazoned the arms of Visconti and Riario. . . . In those rooms, amid those ravelins, where later the intrepid woman awaited the ambition of Borgia and her own ruin, she then received Secretary Nicolò, who took away with him a profound impression of her beauty, her greatness of soul, and the powers of resistance of her castle."

After the departure of Machiavelli, Catherine sent Giovanni da Casale to Florence, with the following credentials—

"*Illustres et excelsi D. D. Priores observandissimi.*—That I be not wanting in what I said to Messer Nicolò Machiavelli, Your Commissioner, I send to Your Excellencies the respectable Messer Joanni, my Auditor, who will express to you all that I have commissioned him to say in my name. I pray Your Excellencies to deign to receive him in good faith, as You would do to me, if I personally presented myself to Your Excellencies, to Whom, as ever, I commend myself. Forli, *die August* 3, 1499.'

# BOOK VII

## CATHERINE AND THE BORGIA



ARMS OF CÆSAR BORGIA.

# CHAPTER XXVII

## THE DEFENCES OF FORLI

KING LOUIS XII. of France, valiant in war and resolute in council, had in the preceding year succeeded his cousin Charles VIII. He assumed the title of Duke of Milan as heir to his ancestress, Valentina Visconti, and that of King of the Two Sicilies, as the House of Anjou had ceded that kingdom to the Crown of France. Having resolved on an invasion of Italy to take possession of these two States, he had made peace with the kings of England and Spain, and with Maximilian, King of the Romans (brother-in-law to Catherine), and needing friends in the Peninsula, had allied himself with the worst enemies of the House of Sforza, the Venetians, promising to reward them by the cession of Cremona and the Ghiaradadda.

Pope Alexander VI. being still the most powerful of Italian princes, King Louis formed an offensive alliance with him, of which Ludovico il Moro was to be the first victim. The Pope's chief aim was the aggrandizement of his son Cæsar, upon

whom Louis XII. had already showered honours, described by Machiavelli, in a letter to the Ten, as excessive.[1] When Cæsar discarded the cardinal's hat, the Pope had deputed Ludovico il Moro to ask for the hand of a daughter of King Frederic of Naples with a view to an alliance between Rome, Naples and Milan. But King Frederic and his daughter were revolted at a proposal of marriage with a priest and the son of a priest, and Cæsar had wedded Charlotte d'Albret, daughter of the King of Navarre. That changed the aspect of affairs; the Pope and his son, who were now relations of the King of France, became the enemies of the States of Milan and Naples, and promised to further the conquests of King Louis if he would aid Cæsar to conquer a State for himself by dethroning the Lords of Romagna.

Peace between Florence and Pisa had been concluded by the arbitration of Duke Hercules of Ferrara, on April 6, but war had now broken out again. Fortune had at first favoured the Florentines, whose army was however destroyed during the summer by malaria, while Paolo Vitelli, suspected of treason, was iniquitously decapitated in Florence on October 1. King Louis, whose latest ally was Philibert, Duke of Savoy, who held the key of Italy, sent his vanguard to Asti under the command of Gian Giacomo Trivulzio, a mortal enemy of Ludovico il Moro, by whom his estates had been confiscated.

Duke Ludovico summoned men to arms, and citizens in council, but it was too late; the people he had persecuted and tortured hated him. Gian Galeazzo Sanseverino,[2] whom he had loaded with gifts and honours, and who was the husband of one of his daughters, was preparing to betray him; he himself hesitated and trembled.

The French took the castles of Arazzo and Annone, the towns of Valenza, Tortona and Voghera; Castelnuovo and Cerone opened their gates to them; the Venetians entered the Ghiaradadda and seized Caravaggio. The French advanced

[1] On October 12, Valenza (Cæsar Borgia had been Cardinal of Valencia in Spain) landed at Marseilles. He was received by the King with excessive honours. —Letter to the Ten (di Balia).

[2] The Count of Caizzo, once an aspirant to the hand of Catherine's daughter Bianca.

on Alessandria, held by a strong garrison under the two brothers Sanseverino. One of them, under the pretence of a summons from the Duke to attend him in Milan, ran away from Alessandria, many following his example. Those who remained were so demoralized that the French disarmed them with impunity and sacked the town. Terrorized by this example, Mortara and Pavia opened their gates to the invaders.

The unhappy Ludovico felt that divine vengeance had overtaken him and his House. He dared neither stay nor resist, and prepared for flight to Germany, where he had sent his children, his treasure of two hundred and forty gold scudi, his gems and marvellous pearls. Since it was impossible to save Milan, he thought that a garrison of 3000 Foot would suffice to hold the castle, which was well provided with arms, ammunition and victuals. He confided its defence to Bernardino da Corte, and left on September 12, in the hope of being reinstated by the King of Naples, the Emperor of Germany and the Swiss.

No sooner had he left the castle than he was approached by his son-in-law, the Count of Caizzo, who declared that since he was leaving the State, the soldiers were absolved of their allegiance; raising the French standard he pursued the fugitive Duke as far as Innspruck, with troops in the latter's pay. Meanwhile the Milanese sent orators six miles beyond the gates to offer the keys of the city to the French; Cremona, besieged by Venice, surrendered to France and Genoa, where the Adorni and Gian Luigi Fieschi, vieing with each other in devotion to France, had already surrendered to her.

When the French had occupied Milan for twelve days, Bernardino da Corte, in whom Ludovico had put his trust, being tempted by a large bribe, surrendered the castle; but so withering was the contempt of his corrupters that he died in a few days of shame and grief. On October 6, Louis XII. made his state entry into Milan, where he was welcomed as the liberator of a people wearied with the tyranny of the Sforza, and met by the orators of other

Italian States. The King received the Mantuan envoy with courtesy, but refused to come to any agreement with those of Ferrara and Bologna until they had disbursed considerable sums. He received the Florentine envoys coldly, because his captains were unanimous in their blame of the execution of Paolo Vitelli, who at Naples had been their beloved and revered companion-in-arms. Besides, the King admired the heroic defence of the Pisans, ancient allies of the kings of France, and offended at the recent alliance of the Florentines with Ludovico il Moro, forgot their services in the past. At last he grudgingly signed an agreement with them, binding himself to defend them in case of attack with 600 Lances and 4000 Foot. The Florentines guaranteed to King Louis the services of 400 Lances and 3000 Foot, and promised, on recovering Pisa, to provide 500 Lances and 50,000 ducats towards the Neapolitan expedition.

Francesco, the imprisoned heir of Catherine's brother, Gian Galeazzo, whose throne had been usurped by Ludovico il Moro, now eight years old, was restored to his mother, who, in her terror of the usurper, imprudently confided the child to Louis XII. Isabel of Aragon returned to Naples, where she was soon to be a witness of the ultimate downfall of her House. Francesco Sforza died in early youth of a fall from his horse while hunting, as Abbot of Noirmoutier, where he had been compelled to take vows.

Meanwhile, Bajazet, Sultan of the Turks, had fiercely attacked the Venetians, not only in the Levant, but in Friuli, where unspeakable cruelties were perpetrated. Whence had descended this sudden and unlooked-for scourge on Italy? It must be traced to the instigation of Ludovico il Moro, who, powerless to defend himself against the French with Italian arms, avenged himself on their Venetian allies by pouring down upon them a barbarian horde of rapacious corsairs.

These were the facts which fed the thoughts and fears of Catherine, from February to November 1499. More than ever she fixed her attention on Rome, which had become the

very centre of corruption and of the most unbridled licence and ambition. She learnt from the letters of the more far-seeing of her friends that everything tended to injure her. "In this alliance between the Emperor Maximilian and the King of France," wrote Pegaso, "the Pope will find the means of aggrandizement for his sons, the Duke (elder brother of Cæsar) and that Cæsar who was once Archbishop of Valenza, and will no longer be a priest. He (the Pope) will seek to establish them firmly in Italy, and I would have Your Excellency believe that he has his eye on Romagna with some forethought and judgment. We are all vigilant and alert . . ." The trusty Fortunati added—

"These be times that call for money and men . . . it is better to spend while there is yet time."

Day by day the Countess, on horseback, watched the drill of her men-at-arms, her Infantry and Light Horse. She did this in order that they might be hired, hoping thus to be sought for and subsidized, and so finding friends, she trusted that, among the many, one might realize the duty and advantage of protecting her. "The Madonna di Forli writes that she has sent five hundred men to Milan, under her son, the Lord Octavian, and that she is sending four hundred others to the Florentines . . . against Pisa," wrote Alvise Venier, Captain and Podestà (military governor) at Ravenna, to his Government. In the harassing uncertainty of Italian politics, Catherine, according to an Italian proverb, "kept her feet in both stirrups." When she had supplied a State with men, arms and ammunition, she pacified the others by asserting that this purely military matter did not involve an alliance. She had already told the Venetians that "Octavian did his duty as a soldier without interfering in politics, and without prejudice to Our State."

Meanwhile this State was afflicted by a new scourge—the plague. Catherine, who was not to be discouraged, closed the gates of the city, as soon as she found that the real plague was within them; promptly provided doctors, medicines, hospitals and gravediggers, and to this wise and vigorous treatment the citizens soon ascribed the cessation

of a visitation that had threatened to decimate the country. The courage and provident care of Catherine in times of pestilence had always been an important factor in her life, and was so still where her own cup was full to overflowing. In the early days of her grief for the loss of a beloved husband, she found herself hemmed in by French and Swiss mercenaries, without hope of relief from Milan, surrounded by a plague-stricken people, her State already assigned as a prey to the frenzied cupidity of Cæsar Borgia, herself and her children given over by the Pope to ruin and death, as if Providence were in league with human malice. For her little Ludovic, the future leader of the Black Bands, who had been ill during the stay of Machiavelli, grew worse from day to day.

"Of our Ludovico, I know not how to write henceforward," wrote the unhappy mother to Lorenzo dei Medici. "This time the fever has come upon him twelve hours sooner, and has been more violent than the last paroxysm." She prayed Lorenzo to pray God that he might "be left to them, if it were for the best."

Her faith in God sustained her; she appealed to Heaven by spending liberally in alms. To the *Murate*, very poor nuns of Florence, she had sent help, and having received a box of flowers from them, wrote the Abbess—"We thank you for them, but pray you not to burden yourselves with such expense for Us, for that would be repaying Us for alms with which We hope to supply you regularly. Pray with the other sisters to Almighty God for Us and all Ours. . . ."

At last, she could write that "Ludovico had so improved that if nothing else happens to him, we hope he may be considered to be cured of this illness. . . . God be thanked for all!" This passage occurs in a letter to Lorenzo de' Medici, in which the Countess thanks him for his courtesy in having visited her orator, Messer Giovanni da Casale, "at his inn," where she had instructed him to dismount, from a prudent regard to present conditions, and especially to those of the city of Florence.

Meanwhile strange rumours concerning the Countess con-

tinued to be transmitted to Venice. "She had caused the castellane of Forli to be hung, and had placed her valuables in the fortress of Imola for safety." Who was this castellane? He is not mentioned elsewhere, and it is evident that the Podestà of Ravenna was misled by a rumour contradicted by future events. There is also mention in the Diary of Sanuto of an attempt on the part of this same castellane to bring about an alliance between Catherine and the Signory of Venice. "September 9 . . . came that envoy from Zuam da Casal . . . he was given fair words and dismissed."

At this point, two great but sinister figures appear upon the scene, the odium of whose fame is unsurpassed in the whole history of Italy. The expedition against Catherine, in which the Borgia compassed her downfall and proved to the world the heroic grandeur of her character, originated in one of the most appalling crimes that history has recorded.

On June 14, 1497, Cæsar Borgia, Cardinal of Valencia, caused his brother Piero, Duke of Candia, to be murdered and thrown into the Tiber, on returning from a supper in the house of Vannozza, his mother. The vilest rumours and a terrible but unproven suspicion darkened the minds of the people. The death of this son nearly cost the Pope his reason; so violent and of so strange a nature had been his grief that it was whispered he had, under the influence of Cæsar, in some way connived at the assassination of Piero, and that the father's sorrow was complicated by a monstrous remorse.

Hence tears in open Consistory, repentance of past errors, vain projects of reforming the corruption of the Court, repulsion to Cæsar, who had brought upon him this despair; ending in reconciliation, a new, blind, and unbalanced love for him, and among other concessions to the fratricide, the promise to abet his attack upon Catherine Sforza and other Romagnole princes ruling as Vicars of the Church. Their States were not to return to the Church, but would be amalgamated into an independent one, under Cæsar, as really a step on the road that led to the Crown of united Italy.

On August 13, 1498, Cardinal Cæsar cast aside his sacerdotal vestments and left for France, taking with him a much-desired pontifical brief, which authorized the King to contract a second marriage. The King assigned to Cæsar a pension of 20,000 livres, besides 20,000 livres pay as captain of a company a hundred strong, and in the following May 1499, gave him the hand of Charlotte d'Albret with the city of Valence in the Dauphiné as her dower. Henceforward Cæsar, ex-Cardinal Valentino of Valencia in Spain, was known as Duke Valentino of France. King Louis offered Cæsar, as a marriage gift, a State in the Duchy of Milan, which he declined. But the Pope promised the King a certain number of pontifical troops for the Milanese expedition on condition that the French army should help Cæsar to depose the petty princes whom he accused of usurping the rights of the Church in Romagna.

In twenty days the King had conquered Milan, and on October 16, Catherine received a letter from Nicolò Machiavelli, in which he announced that he had obeyed her commands, and had informed the King of France, through the Florentine orators at Milan, that she was an ally of the Florentine Republic. But of what avail? Catherine had said a hundred times that the Florentines were generous in words, but nothing else.

Valentino obtained 15,000 French troops for his expedition in Romagna. It was notified to the Republic of Florence and the other States which had not joined the League between the Pope, the King of France and the Venetians, that they must abstain from helping any State attacked in the name of the Pope, and the Florentines were specially warned that Pisa would be given to Valentino if they helped the Lady of Forli. This silenced the Florentines, although at heart they regretted the Pope's designs on their ally, for whose protection they had in vain attempted to form a League between Bologna, Ferrara, Piombino and Sienna. A new Florentine Commissioner,[1] Berto da Filicaja, was appointed in Romagna, who was in-

[1] Machiavelli, *Scritti inediti riguardanti la Storia e la Milizia.*—Florence, Barb, 1857.

structed to "be vigilant that no Florentine soldier nor subject did aught for or against the Madonna of Forli or her enemies," and every one, as Vincenzo Calmeta wrote, in sorrow, on October 31, 1499, to the Countess, "has resigned himself to the ruin and undoing of Your Ladyship."

Calmeta wrote that although he had spoken to Gian Giacomo Trivulzio, and even to the King, he had only succeeded in retarding the inevitable fall of the bolt. The French, who had no wish to go to war with the Countess, "had tried to divert the Pope from this fantasy by saying that the Milanese expedition had cost so much money that they had none left for this. . . . The Pope (then) asked of the King's Majesty the (bare) loan of men and artillery, the whole expense of which he would defray himself. His Majesty has lent him some cannons and a hundred lances to guard them. Yesterday I complained to Messer Gian Giacomo (Trivulzio) that this was contrary to what His Lordship had led me to expect. . . . He replied in these very words—'If you do harm to yourselves, how can I help you?'" These words had at first seemed enigmatical to Calmeta, who ended by discovering "that all the harm came from Rome," where the Cardinals Riario and Della Rovere were doing their worst. Calmeta further relates that yesterday's audience gave him an opportunity "of submitting Your Ladyship's needs to my Lord the King, . . . who, in French, replied to me in these few words, 'We are not the Pope's judges, that We cannot impede the exercise of his jurisdiction in his own dominions,' adding that his captains could defend You against any other power, but that it would not be lawful to do so against the Pope, of whom You are a tributary." There had been no sign of assuming the offensive until "this morning, when the Pope's son has begun to disburse pay to 2000 Foot, who in a few days will have marching orders; he is Captain-general of all the Forces. . . . The Florentines tolerate this attack upon Your Ladyship so that they may escape scot-free, for otherwise the Pope would have given Pisa to his son." The Neapolitan expedition was postponed until the spring, and nothing had been decided as to Forli "until this morning,

when everything has been settled." Catherine, on receiving this letter, rode across the Apennines to make a personal appeal to those Florentines for whom she had sacrificed and endured so much, but they were deaf to her voice and unmoved by her prayers. With incisive yet winning words she told them how that the Pope, by whom they permitted their hands to be bound, would not rest after she had been despoiled. "To-day is my turn . . . to-morrow will be yours." In vain; for if they stirred in defence of Forli, Cæsar Borgia would seize Pisa.

"The Lady of Forli," says the *Venetian Chronicle*, "in expectation of the army of Valentino, set herself zealously to work, and cut down all the trees near the city. Having burned down the suburbs, she fortified the land as best she could, like the notable woman that she was. When she had erected fortifications, she went in person to Florence to ask for help, giving the Florentines to understand that her feast was but the vigil (prelude) to theirs, and that when they and the papal troops had taken Imola and Forli, they would not rest until they had got to Florence.[1] But the Florentine Signori, for many reasons, would not interfere. . . . The Lady of Forli let no grass grow under her feet, and returning from Florence without having accomplished anything, (forthwith) fortified Forli and sent her children, because of their tender age, under safe guardianship to Florence. She had, besides, cut off the water-supplies in the hills and flooded the territory round the city, so that none might approach it, without heed to the damage sustained by citizens, which she promised to make good to them; and then, with a high heart and spirit, awaited her enemies. Certes, this woman, who was sister to the Duke of Milan, and did not degenerate from the strain of which she came, might well be called virago.[2] . . ."

On November 5, Sanuto's diary contains the entry—

" . . . The Pope's son[3] with his army is about to encamp

[1] *Cronicon Venetum*, Muratori R. I. Scr. XXIV., 128, 129.

[2] Virago as employed by Ariosto, Tasso, and Boiardo in the sense of a woman of virile mind.

[3] El fiol del Papa.

Imola and Forli and take Pesaro, whose poor lord doth at commend himself to the Signory (of Venice), saying that he will turn monk, while the Madonna of Forli continues to fortify herself and lay in great store of provisions."

For Catherine preferred the seclusion of a fortress to that of a cloister, but the other lords of Romagna believed themselves to be lost before they were attacked. Giovanni Sforza[1] had indeed offered Pesaro to the Venetians, in return for the protection he craved of them. This offer they were constrained to refuse, in deference to the King of France, and that they might be the better able to hold Rimini for Pandolfo Malatesta, and Faenza for Astorre Manfredi, despite the remonstrances of the Pope. On the 15th, Machiavelli wrote Antonio Canigiani, Florentine commissioner with the army—"The latest news is that His Majesty the King has left Milan for Vigevano on his way to Lyons, and on the same day, which was the 9th, 300 French Lancers and 4000 Swiss advanced on the Madonna of Imola; all subsidized by the Pope, who would give that State, with Rimini, Faenza, Pesaro, Cesena and Urbino, to him of Valentino (le Valentinois). It is believed that unless the populace are disloyal to Madonna, she will defend herself; if she cannot defend the land because of the perfidy of the (rural) population, the fortresses will be held: in any case it would appear that she is so minded."

Besides the French, 15,000 troops, under Ives d'Alègre and the 4000 Swiss under the Bailli of Dijon, Cæsar Borgia personally commanded those papal forces which the Pope had sent for the facile conquest of the Duchy of Milan.

By a circular addressed to the consuls and the Commune of Bologna, King Louis, on November 5, apprised them that he was sending an army under Cæsar Borgia, Duke of Valentino, to besiege and take the fortresses of Imola and Forli on behalf of the Pope. Catherine was specially denounced because it was averred that despite continual warning and menace she had, during the last three years, refused to pay tribute to the Apostolic treasury.

A Roman tribunal had already declared Imola and Forli

[1] Giovanni Sforza, first husband of Lucretia Borgia.

to be forfeited by Catherine and her children, and the papal bull of March 9, 1499, signed by seventeen cardinals, confirmed the deposition of this "Daughter of Iniquity,"[1] and invested Cæsar Borgia with her States. The Lords of Romagna, who ruled as Vicars of the Church, were accused of regarding themselves as independent, and serving in the armies of other princes without refusing to be led against the Sovereign Pontiff. "These Lords," wrote Muratori, "held their cities by right of pontifical bulls: it mattered not, they had to yield to the ambitions of the House of Borgia: and pretexts for despoiling the lawful owners were not wanting to those who were waiting to build a majestic edifice over their ruins."

The Countess, on hearing of what she was accused, had immediately despatched Dr. Giovanni dalle Selle to Rome, to disburse the 3000 gold florins said to be due from her, and to present the account drawn up by the Apostolic treasury on the death of Sixtus IV., with an additional counter-claim for four years of pay due to Girolamo, as Captain-general of the Church, during his absence in Romagna.

Nothing had availed her. Despite his urgent prayers for a personal audience, the envoy returned without having been permitted to see Alexander VI. The Treasury disclaimed any cognizance of the rights and dues of the late Count Girolamo.

"The Treasury," wrote Girolamo Sacrati to the Duke of Ferrara, "will prosecute the Lord of Forli and Imola with the utmost rigour." Cardinal Riario had put forward, in favour of his nephews, the 60,000 ducats to which their father's rights entitled them, "*iis non obstantibus*, the Pope has insisted on sentence, signed by his own hand, being given against them . . ."

Imola and Forli were the keys of Romagna, which, in its turn, Catherine realized was the door to be opened by Cæsar Borgia on the dominion of all Italy. "The Pope,"

[1] Bull of Alexander VI. deposing the Riario and their mother from the Vicariats of Imola and Forli.

wrote Sanuto, "claims Bologna, Imola and Forli, but says Messer Gian Giacomo (Trivulzio), 'he who hunts every hare catches none.'" Catherine was none the less resolved to defend her children's rights to the bitter end, and by upholding their rank as reigning princes, to vindicate the honour and restore the fallen fortunes of the House of Sforza.

Yet the undaunted opponent of the Borgia—who were known to dispose of their enemies by poison, drowning, flaying alive, or throat-cutting—was a woman who knew that neither her armies nor her foresight could prevail against the impending terrors. Despite a tranquillity assumed to encourage her defenders, her clear mind read the future, and she trembled and turned to Heaven for guidance and support. The Abbess of the *Murate* sent her fruit from her Florentine orchard: to her thanks she added prayers that she would "remember her in her orations, so that amid these turmoils of the world, God may defend Us and show Us the right way." In a letter to Francesco Gonzaga, Marquis of Mantua, to whom she sent a present of a Spanish mare and stallion, she writes—"The Pope, without a semblance of justice, persecutes Us, so that he may give this State to his son; but We, knowing ourselves to be blameless, cannot believe that God and man will withhold compassion from Us. On Our side, we despair not, but shall defend Our own as long as We can, so that perchance they may find (the enterprise) less easy than they persuade themselves."

Catherine had passed the summer in collecting arms, provisions and ammunition for the fortresses of Imola and Forli. This, by the light of family tradition, had been easy to her, who for many years had made of her State a factory and market of arms and soldiers. She had assembled many experts in war, whom she had chosen, so far as it had been possible, from ancient and illustrious houses, that their names might lend weight to her cause. She summoned Scipio, the natural son of Girolamo, from his exile, and her three brothers, Alexander Sforza, the Count of Melzo, and another whose name does not appear. Early in November, she sent

Octavian to Imola to probe the mind of its citizens and to prepare the city for defence. Octavian announced to the council that his mother was preparing for defence against the French and pontifical forces, and if they were of the same mind, he was prepared to aid and second them in all they could desire. He dilated on the justice of his cause, and freed them, from that moment, of all custom-house duties. The Imolese demanded the return of their exiles to aid in the defence—which Catherine granted—and promised fealty so long as it did not entail useless bloodshed.

Giovanni Pietro Landriani, Catherine's stepfather, old and inexperienced in war, castellane of Imola, was replaced by Dionisio Naldi of Brisighella, who owed his life to the Countess, and whom the Florentines would have thrown into the horrible prison of the *Stinche* when he was suspected of the murder of Corbizzi but for her intercession. "Your Magnificence is aware how much I love Dionisio di Naldi, for his loyalty and devotion, albeit he hath a head of his own," she had written to Lorenzo Medici; "fearing his enemies might compass his death, and greatly desiring his deliverance." This she had obtained by an exchange of prisoners, and Naldi, in return, brought two hundred men to the defence of the Fort of Imola, which he promised to hold with his life, giving Catherine his wife and children as hostages.

The Imolese then closed all the city gates and refused to be exempted from custom-house duties, in gratitude for which Octavian suppressed the weight and meat taxes. Naldi, the new castellane, strengthened the fortification of the castle and the city wall, and summoned to his aid ten of his bravest and most trusty kinsmen. The garrison consisted of eighty experienced and faithful soldiers, the peasant battalions were levied and drilled by Giovanni Sassatelli (the famous *Cagnazzo*), and on the 13th Octavian returned to Forli.

Meanwhile Valentino advanced by the Ferrara road, and as the garrisons of Dozza and Tossignano were without wheat, the Governor of Imola ordered 4000 measures to be divided between them. The Imolese refused to obey

the governor's edict because it lacked the impress of "the cornelian" (Catherine's seal). Catherine sent a decree to which her seal was attached, but the citizens tore it into shreds in the governor's face. Naldi then imprisoned Governor Corradino in the fort, for not having either prevented or punished the offence. A citizen attempted to set some hay-stores on fire, lest they should fall into the hands of the enemies, for which the Imolese would have skinned him and his family alive, had he not escaped in time to Forli.

The defences of Forli were admirable. From every quarter, ammunition, provisions, tried soldiers and brilliant captains poured into the town; walls, moats and towers were kept in constant repair: every thought and act of the Countess breathed courage and resistance. Octavian had, on November 1, summoned the members of council to the great hall of the palace, and made them acquainted with the Pope's pretensions regarding the tribute, and his repudiation of the debt due to the Riario. This was confirmed by Dalle Selle, who, "by command and in the name of Octavian, declared that if the Pope, with the object of extorting payment twice over, sent an army against Madonna Caterina, she without hesitation or tremor had resolved to await it undismayed, confiding in the justice of her cause, the valour of her soldiers and the loyal aid of her people of Forli. With regard to the intentions of the people of Forli, the Countess earnestly desired to be fully and promptly acquainted with them. Let them therefore give the matter consideration, take the measure of their courage, and clearly formulate their desires. . . If, for the love of life and property, and in the belief that any defence was foolhardy, they preferred to receive the army of Valentino, let them remember that it was composed of every species of barbarians: Swiss, Gascons, Germans, French and Spaniards, people to whom law and order were unknown; who seized, occupied, ruined, attacked and contaminated everything with which they came in contact. He who opened the door to the invaders," continued the auditor,[1] "submitted to the

[1] Bernardi, p. 398.

hardest of slaveries; thus it had been in the time of King Charles VIII.; thus it was in Lombardy, at the present moment. The Pope would wrest the State from the House of Riario, not indeed for the Church, but for his son, who as usual would become a nobody on the death of the Pontiff; a sad and frequent occurrence in papal government. Madonna Caterina, for the love she bore her subjects, had determined to die Lady of Imola and Forli, and on her faith she vowed that as she had ever known how to be a grateful friend to her friends, so would she mete out inexorable justice to her enemies." Dr. Giovanni dalle Selle further declared that he had, during his mission to Rome, settled the debit and credit account of the Riario with the Apostolic treasury with the minutest detail, "so that if His Holiness sends a punitive army against us it will be without a pretext." Every one cried, sooner death and destruction than yield to a pope with such iniquitous pretensions, and the council, having reiterated its protests of loyalty to the Riario, separated to the cry of "Ottaviano! Ottaviano!"

On the following day, the council assembled again to consider the preliminaries of confiding the defence of each quarter of the city to four nobles under the supreme command of the poet Marullo of Constantinople, who, with the auditor and Octavian, was present in council. Marullo related how, at Milan, he had spoken with the King of France, from whom he had gathered that His Majesty cared not at all for these petty conquests in Romagna, but that Duke Valentino was eager, on personal and self-interested grounds, to come to a collision with the Countess.

Catherine, who, abandoned by her natural allies, still sought shelter for her children while she prepared to weather the storm, did not hesitate to apply to her old foes, the Venetians. To her inquiry of whether they would receive her children, they replied promptly in the affirmative. The same request was made by Cardinal Riario to the Venetian Orator in Rome, who promised that they should be honourably treated.

This friendly reply gave her hope that in extreme need she

might turn for help to the Venetians, who, although like the Florentines, they had been forced into the League with the Pope and France, looked with disfavour on an expedition destined to overthrow the Lords of Romagna and found a new State for Cæsar Borgia. Yet, after mature consideration, she sent her children to Florence to a property of Giovanni de' Medici, her late husband, situate in a remote and quiet part of Tuscany, and thither she also sent her jewels and most important documents.[1]

Catherine struck copper coins, of which there was a great scarcity, and announced by public edict that she would be beholden to any one who with spades, mattocks, or any other instruments, helped to demolish the pleasure-house in her park. She had built it at great expense, some years ago, but now that it was necessary to level the outlook in front of the fort, she did not hesitate to destroy it. So many people desirous of proving their loyalty obeyed her summons, that in one day all trace of it disappeared. Another edict prescribed the destruction of every edifice within a radius of a quarter of a mile of the city, and any one who possessed a villa or farm within a mile of the walls was ordered to cut down such trees or shrubs as might conceal it. To mitigate the regrets of the owners, Catherine was the first to cut down all the trees in her park. Peasants were enjoined at sound of the third cannonade to abandon their homesteads and bestow themselves and their belongings within the walls: it was made incumbent on every household in the city to store four months' provisions. Octavian's promised exemptions at Imola gave rise to much discussion in council and abroad. Catherine, offended at what appeared to her an abuse of her bounty, caused a gallows and stocks to be erected in the square, and as the disaffection continued, was constrained to make public the announcement that her income from Forli amounted to no more than 22,000 livres, and that she could grant no further exemptions. This explanation sufficed, and bonfires were lighted in the streets in sign of satisfaction

[1] Burriel asserts that he examined these documents among the Riario archives at Bologna in 1795.

at the concessions already obtained. No sooner had Octavian returned from Imola than he was made to join in the work of defence. He rose before daybreak, and was seen to leave the fort, enter the shops, and persuade their owners to leave them ; in a short time all the shops were closed and the salesmen converted into workmen.

Octavian's dinner was carried to him at the gate of St. Peter, so that it was not necessary for him to leave the centre of action, and a few nobles were invited to share it with him. He did not limit himself to directing and encouraging the men, but with Bartolomeo Capoferri and Paolo Dall' Aste, who were of his own age and stature, helped to wheel the barrows of earth. Spurred by his example, gentlemen of the court, priests and monks mingled with the populace, and worked with as good a will ; the work progressed as if by enchantment, and the defences soon reached from the fort to the gate of Schiavonia.

The bastion of the suburb of Sadurano was demolished, lest it should serve as a shelter to the enemy : the castle tower, which still exists, was uncovered on all sides, and certain battlements removed that impeded the action of artillery. Several notaries were charged to draw up a list of all the arms that the city contained, and the Countess, finding them inadequate for present needs, distributed a quantity of those she had stored for some time past, and amply provided the people with cuirasses, casques and spears.

While this was happening, a certain Guidotto, a French soldier of fortune, arrived at the gates of Forli with 400 Gascon and German foot-soldiers. He had fought with the Pisans, and since the termination of their war, sought fresh employment. On hearing of the preparations for the defence of Forli, he hastened to offer his services to the Countess who entered into an agreement with him, but there being no room for another soldier in the fort, Catherine quartered the new contingent among the monks of St. Mercurial, St. Domenic and St. Francis. These Ultramontanes proved to be such utter fiends that the wretched monks were, in self-defence, obliged to call armed citizens to their aid. During a

brawl between Gascons and Germans, the citizens discovered three corpses and some wounded in the square, and a turmoil ensued. Octavian, who arrived from the gate of St. Peter, commanded that henceforward the barbarians be permitted to settle their disputes among themselves, without interference from the citizens, that the wounded be attended to, and property restored to the rightful owners under penalty of the gallows.

Several persons were imprisoned in the fort, for secretly favouring Valentino; among these was a son of the banker Giuntino, married to a daughter of Achille Tiberti, once a favoured captain of Catherine's, but now serving under Valentino against her. Many refused to accept money lately coined by Catherine, upon which the hard necessity of the times had imposed an arbitrary value higher than its intrinsic value. A new edict made the passing of these coins compulsory. Another edict compelled citizens to convey to a banker designated by her all the gold and silver they kept in their houses in return for their equivalents in the new coin: each to be indemnified for any loss he might sustain, on the cessation of hostilities. The Countess further decreed that whoever wished to enter the service should appear in the square before a high constable deputed to register the names of aspiring soldiers, and, when the arrival of the enemy seemed imminent, she again intimated to the rural population to come into the city with all their property. By day and night she mustered her soldiers, her artillery and inspected her defences, outwardly calm, like the able seaman, who, having taken in sail and made everything secure, intrepidly awaits the storm.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### VALENTINO TAKES IMOLA

VALENTINO avoided Bologna, where Bentivoglio had forestalled him by arming the populace, and marching on Romagna by the Ferrara road, halted with the bulk of his army at Cantalupo. Thence he despatched Achille Tiberti with five hundred Horse to Imola. This deserter to Catherine's cause arrived at the Spuviglio Gate, which was walled and well defended, summoned the constable who guarded it, and in the name of the Church, the King of France and the League demanded the surrender of the city. The constable hastened to inquire of the magistrates what was to be done. He returned with Giovanni Sassatelli, who, in the name of the magistracy, offered the city to Tiberti and Valentino unconditionally, and causing the gate to be cleared, received Tiberti with his five hundred Horse. They were conducted to a suburb, where they found provisions and forage for man and horse awaiting them. Tiberti, on finding himself master of the city, demanded the keys. The castellane Naldi was enraged by the cowardly betrayal of the magistracy who owed so much to Catherine and been so prodigal of promises of faithful service. Why, indeed, had they walled up the gate if on the first appearance of the enemy they had intended to open it? But since he was master of the fort, he held that all was not yet lost, and directed a cannonade against the quarters of Tiberti to the damage of the city and the terror of its inhabitants.

On November 25, the 15,000 men of Valentino came

down upon Imola and filled the little city to overflowing, with the intention of bombarding the fort that alone, but obstinately, held out. Tiberti, who hated Naldi for his loyalty to Catherine, persuaded Valentino to place his batteries in the western quarter of the town, and to open fire; but, says Oliva—"Vain was this thought, for the cannonade, with the exception of breaking the mural crown, did little damage, so strong and well-built was the wall on that side."

Valentino, who was anxious to leave for Rome, yet not before he had taken the fort, was enraged. To make an end of it, he sent a trumpeter to Naldi, demanding an immediate surrender of the fort, with the alternative that when it was taken—as would infallibly happen—the garrison would be hacked to pieces, and he and his kinsmen hanged by the neck. Naldi replied that he dreaded only the prospect of being hanged for treason, but cared not what he suffered in the cause of constant and honourable faith to his banner and his Lady; foreseeing the event announced to him, he had already taken the Sacrament, so that he might die not only a good soldier, but a good Christian.

The boldness of his reply pleased Valentino, who then bethought himself of approaching Naldi by means of his kinsfolk in Valdilamone.

Among these was Vitellozzo Vitelli, who, with the others, assured him that he had achieved prodigies of valour, and that now that it was his duty to surrender . . . neither Catherine, nor any other could blame him. . . . They entreated him "not to await the second battery, when all chance of escape or pardon would be at an end; neither was he justified, for the sake of a vain ostentation of bravery, in further endangering the lives and fortunes of his own blood, and many another good man." But, continues Oliva, he replied that "these offices were not for his peers . . . . he persisted in defending himself, not for vanity of bravery, but to keep his troth to one who had confided to him the defence of the fort." The Duke would not find it so easy to take as he imagined, "and he prayed Vitelli to come into the fort and see for himself whether, in arrogance or reason, he

answered as he did." The fort was capable of holding out for a year, and he had promised Catherine to hold it for that time. He felt within himself the power to keep his word, as security for which he had given his wife and children as hostages to Catherine. "Sooner than fail to his honour and duty, he would be cut to pieces with the garrison a hundred times over."

Valentino, again disappointed, succeeded in sending certain persons inside the fort to inform him of its condition. He learnt that it would be idle to persist in plying cannon against a castle so admirably defended. Naldi continued to bombard the town with greater energy than ever. Houses fell, towers were ruined, the presence of Borgia and his army was no defence against the projectiles discharged night and day from the fort, and it was soon patent to every one that if it were possible to subdue the fort, it would be at the expense of incalculable time and bloodshed.

But guile prevailed where force had been unavailing. A carpenter acquainted with the construction of the fort betrayed its vulnerability to the Duke, to whom he pointed out that at a certain point the fort could not resist a vigorous attack, recommending him to change the position of his batteries. Valentino at once grasped the idea, but before attacking, he determined to assure himself of the valour of his soldiers by distributing double pay.

To this end he despatched Achille Tiberti (who certainly did not take the Forli road), with a strong escort, to Cesena to bring him a considerable sum of money which had been sent by his cousin, Cardinal Borgia, as a contribution to the expedition against Catherine. On the return of Tiberti, the money was distributed, and then only did Valentino place his batteries in the position that had been indicated by the traitor.

At nightfall, Valentino opened fire on the ravelin at the gate, and on the chief bridge of the fort, and by dawn had opened a breach wide enough to admit of an assault which enabled him to effect an entry into the outer courtyard, where a furious onslaught by the garrison forced the invaders

to retire on the ravelin. But the strength of the army enabled the Duke to renew the assault with fresh men and with overwhelming numbers and with a continual exchange of combatants, until, when twilight fell upon the exhausted garrison, Naldi, who was wounded in the head, was obliged to own to himself that the Duke's victory was assured, and that he was capable of the butchery with which he had threatened them.

From the height of the tower came a trumpet-blast directing a cessation of hostilities. Naldi asked for a three days'



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truce, wherein to inform the Countess of what had occurred and to await reinforcements. The Duke, in recognition of his valour, acceded to his request, writing on the following day to the Duke of Ferrara that "the Fort of Imola, strong in construction and the valour of its well-armed garrison," was practically at his mercy, and failing intervention on the part of Madonna Caterina,[1] would be taken by him on the 11th (December).

Giovanni Landriani and a brother of Naldi went to inform the Countess of her loss, but she could not afford to weaken

[1] Doc. 1107.

the garrison of Forli, and the three days having elapsed without the arrival of succour, Naldi surrendered to the victor on the following conditions—

1. That the whole garrison should pass out, unharmed and unmolested.

2. That each man should take his property with him, without having to submit to examination.

3. That military honours be rendered to the garrison.

On these conditions Naldi agreed to surrender the fort with its guns and ammunition. To these conditions the Duke agreed, and Naldi, after an honourable capitulation, retired to his property at Cotignola. The wound in his head prevented his taking part in the Lombard war, but he later took service with the Venetians, and died, in 1509, as Commander of their Infantry.

After the fall of the Castle of Imola, the other little fortresses of the county opened their gates to Valentino, with the exception of the Fort of Dozza, which refused to surrender, and was taken by force. Its castellane, Gabriele del Pico d'Oriolo, was denied the credit "of true valour," and punished "for his purposeless temerity" by being dragged in chains to the dungeons of Imola, while his kinsmen, in chains, were compelled to work in the entrenchments.

# CHAPTER XXIX

## FORLI BEFORE THE SIEGE

THE surrender of Imola was a great shock to the people of Forli, who, realizing that at any moment they might find themselves in the same predicament, began to ask themselves, whether, after all, the people of Imola had not done wisely in opening their gates, and thus saving themselves from worse ills. Some praised and held them worthy of imitation, others persisted in the determination to resist.

When Catherine became aware that this new ferment was rising from the populace, until it divided even the magistrates in council, she sent Alexander Sforza to the chief magistrate desiring him to find a way for the citizens to formulate their wishes and ideas. "Was it the wish of the people and the determination of the Magistracy to close the gates on Cæsar Borgia and defy his army? Or would they go the way of the people of Imola?" Madonna desired to be acquainted surely and promptly of their intentions, for in case the people of Forli decided "to stand by her," she would supply them with arms, cannon, and a number of experienced soldiers, led by captains of acknowledged merit.

But if they preferred to open the gates to the invaders rather than run the risks of defence, the Countess would retain these forces for the defence of the fort. She was persuaded that the courageous resistance of her people would ensure her success, yet could neither explain nor exact heroic virtues from a peace-loving population; nor would she, in the future, ever complain of being abandoned by the citizens in

this emergency. The chief magistrate replied that the city was all for the Countess; he would reply more fully when he had summoned the council. The council decided on sending the following reply by five influential citizens to Count Alexander Sforza—

"What need had Madonna the Countess to weary her brain with the question of the loyalty of Forli? Has she not had every assurance of it? Has she not tried and proved it? It were vain to report to her on the state of the city's defences, for none knew them better than herself. Thus, having well deliberated and considered, nothing remained for them to add; yet it were well to recall to the memory of Madonna the examples of those personages who had recently found themselves in a like position: that of the King of Naples, when assailed by the forces of Charles VIII. which so greatly outnumbered his own, and of the more recent case of the Duke of Milan, her uncle. Of what avail had been all his men to him, when they of France had fallen upon him? . . . The King and the Duke had both understood the necessity of retiring in order to spare their subjects from the purposeless ills of war, and if they had left their States, it was with the hope of returning to them in better times. And if, in their own case, the Countess yielded to present violence, everything led them to believe that a new pope would reinstate her and hers. None were ignorant that Pope Alexander had invested his son Cæsar with Romagna, abetted by a few of his creatures of the Spanish faction, but without the consent of the other cardinals. Meanwhile a new council would be summoned, and he would lose no time in acquainting the Countess with the result of its deliberations."

Upon receiving this message, Catherine immediately sent Landriani to tell the members of council that they were "Rabbits.". . . "Know ye not," continued Landriani, in her name, "that a ruined State is better than a lost one! Do as you will with your city, but as regards the fort, I have a mind to prove to Borgia that even a woman is capable of firing cannon."

On December 12, the chief magistrate, Tornielli, again dis-

cussed the prospects of the city in council, repeating the message of Catherine, who, if the citizens had decided on not imitating the cowardly example of Imola, would give them a guard of 2000 veterans, with more to follow, and would bind herself not to come to any terms with the Duke without the consent of the city. If, on the other hand, Forli determined on resistance only up to a certain point, but, later on, to accept terms from the enemy—according to circumstances — that also would be acceptable to the Countess, who resolved as she was to fight to the last, yet if overpowered by the enemy, would fain leave her city at peace with her good people of Forli . . . from whom she now demanded a reply worthy of them and herself.

So many were the opinions elicited by this speech that night had come upon the council before they had come to any decision. The county deputies left the matter in the hands of the Ancients, praying the magistracy not to count on a civic guard, drawn from the rural population, most of the peasants having fled, with their herds, to avoid contact with the invaders.

Catherine, seeing that she could no longer count on the loyal support of the citizens, and possibly foreseeing that Octavian might be torn from her and given as a hostage to Borgia, sent him, with her auditor, to Tuscany. This act, in which maternal solicitude swept away every other consideration, seems, at first sight, inconsistent with her efforts to train her son as a warrior-prince and with the share she had caused him to take in the defences of the city. It may be ascribed to a survival of the terror endured by Catherine on behalf of her children during the revolution of the Orsi. "After the loss of Imola," says Oliva, "she sent away Octavian, to be free of every care save that of defending her person, which, with her State, she had resolved to expose to the utmost risk."

The departure of Octavian relieved Catherine of her only fear ; and, with renewed energy, on that same day she rode to Forlimpopoli and examined its walls, the fort, the cannon,

powder magazines, provisions, and ammunition, as if she had been a veteran soldier. She destroyed the bridges leading to the citadel and the fort, with the exception of one, which was also destroyed on the arrival of Valentino. Meanwhile the chief magistrate had not yet given a decisive answer to Alexander Sforza, both the council-general of Four Hundred and the council of Forty having failed to come to a decision. They found it difficult to communicate with Count Alexander, "who had returned to dwell in the fort, and as for the Countess, she had not waited for an official reply to come to the conclusion that Forli did not feel called upon to follow her in a desperate enterprise. Every act of Madonna proves that she is not counting on us."

In those days Catherine indeed dispensed with the advice and consent of council in doing and undoing as she thought best. She ordered that all carts of wood and straw that entered the city be taken to the fort and day-labourers were all compelled to work in the entrenchments, which was easily managed, since all the gates except that of Ravaldino were closed. Catherine continued to increase the number of the inmates of the fort, and add to the stock of its provisions, until it would not hold another man. The more distinguished of her guests, who formed, as it were, her staff, differed so essentially in race, temperament and habit that in any other time and place they must have fallen out with each other; yet they all lived together in peace and good-will, imbued with the same spirit as the heroic woman whom it was their glory to serve.

It was otherwise with the multitude of soldiers, especially among the Germans, Gascons, and labourers, who soon degenerated into an uncontrollable rabble. Every one wondered how the austere Countess could tolerate their turbulence, while she, realizing the impossibility of reducing the crowd to order within so confined a space, and considering the urgency of the moment, perforce refused to see and hear.

While Catherine was beginning to fear that mutiny and misrule within might complicate the danger from without,

she learned that Luffo Numai, the loyal and generous subject who, with Octavian, had given a security on his property for the 25,000 gold florins demanded by the Medici as a kind of bail for the child of Giovanni Popolano, that same Luffo Numai was with other nobles plotting her ruin.

Catherine determined to lay hands upon him at once, and to sack his house. The rumour reached Numai, who abstained from entering his house, but remained near to it under the protection of the guard in the square, now dependent rather on the magistracy than on Catherine. Still, as nothing had happened either to the house or its owner, it was believed that the disloyal intentions of Numai and the punitive ones of Catherine were inventions of the Evil One to attract Luffo, who had been hitherto neutral, to the cause of Valentino. Luffo's absence from his house during the night had tended to give credit to the rumour ; wherefore, at break of day, Simone Ambruni, Guglielmo Lambertelli, Giovanni Marattini, Giovanni dalle Selle, and other friends of Luffo went to the guard-house to interrogate him. Luffo informed them that he stayed there because he preferred shedding his blood in the open square to hiding in his house until he was taken by treachery "and fell into the hands of a furious and now desperate woman."

"When the aforesaid gentlemen," says Bernardi, "heard these words, they were very grieved, and forthwith agreed to consent to whatever he might propose." The council had as yet given no answer to Count Alexander, for they had not yet been able to come to any decision. The case of Luffo Numai, count, knight, head of an ancient, illustrious, wealthy and influential family, provided an excellent opportunity for sounding the temper of the people, and they begged him to address the crowd, which had already surrounded the guard in great numbers.

Luffo, assuming an elevated position, raised his voice and pointed out to the populace, "that the people of Forli could in all honour and conscience abandon Catherine. Nay, it was their duty. Octavian was indeed their lawful sovereign

and they had all sworn fealty to Catherine, his mother and guardian. But Catherine herself, in her wisdom and foresight, had she not absolved them by her messages to the citizens and magistrates? And how often had she declared that the will of the people would ever be her own and that she would always rather abide by their decision than be deceived by them.

"More than that, Octavian had personally declared in council that a papal decree had deposed him and deprived him of his rights, authority and dominion in the States of Forli and Imola. Now, a city, in all public and legal matters, should conform to public and legal decrees rather than to personal and private opinions of individuals. If the sentence which deposed the Riario were unjust, Pope Alexander must one day answer for it to the Supreme Judge; the citizens might not dispute its justice, they could only submit to it. . . More than that . . . the arrival of an army of 14,000 men, led by famous captains, was imminent. Where were the forces that could resist them? Was it really the duty of citizens to give themselves and their families up to butchery, and bury themselves under the ruins of their city? It should suffice that those sons of Forli who were Catherine's soldiers and were shut up with her in the fort, remained faithful to her; they who had chosen that part had a right to suffer for it; but not so an entire inoffensive population. . . . For the rest, the Pope's dominion was not only the most legitimate but the most beneficial to the State. Under papal rule Forli had been happiest; then the German emperors had fallen upon them, and Guelph and Ghibelline factions had divided them, and tyrants had battened upon them as evil weeds, that grow apace in a juniper thicket. . . . Hence the Calboli, the Orgogliosi, the Ordelaffi, who had oppressed Forli and drenched her with blood. Cardinal Albornoz had given them back to the Pope, but his successors had ruled with too light a hand, and the Ordelaffi had again come to the front. Then Pope Sixtus had come upon the scene, and had invested his nephew with the dominion of the city. After him, thanks to the imbecility of his son, Catherine had governed and mastered

them and now, thanks to her, they found themselves on the edge of the precipice.

"And what had they witnessed under the government of this woman? Exile, outlawry, confiscations, tortures and blood . . . and yet more blood! Blessed be the government of the popes, under which there was no possibility of a minority, nor of falling into the hands of a woman. Tell me, tell me, I beseech you," cried Numai, "is there a man among you who has been able to marry his daughter to whom he chose? Between the government of Catherine and that of the Church there is no room for choice. If Catherine," he continued, "isolated and abandoned by every one, hopes for help from Germany and persists in resistance, her temerity is excusable because her fortress is strong and well-provisioned; but is that a reason why we, poor defenceless people, should give up ourselves and our families to all the horrors and indignities of war?" After this discourse (says Bernardi), the city "did, with one accord, determine to withdraw the government of the State from Madonna and her children, and the people cried '*Popolo! Popolo!*' at the top of their voices. The palace bell was rung sturdily, and at its summons the crowd became denser, and the new-comers joined with the others in plaudits to the new Lord. The castellanes who held the gates on behalf of Catherine were replaced by others, except those of Schiavonia and Ravaldino, which, being under cover of the cannon of those forts, could not be tampered with. A new council, a new magistracy and twenty elders, five for each quarter of the city, were elected, with full authority in matters civil, military and political. The council met on matters of supreme or common import, but local and minor matters were settled by the Ancients of each quarter, under the presidency of their leader or *gonfaloniere*."

Catherine was far from unprepared for this turn of events: she could not expect a whole population to follow her in a desperate cause; she had foreseen their defection, and in a measure sanctioned it; for how could a city, open on almost every side to the attacks of the invaders, defend itself against

an army like that of Valentino, without a leader who looked upon it as his own ?

A courier at full speed was despatched by the Ancients to the camp of Valentino, to announce the surrender of the city. The Duke sent Achille Tiberti to Forli, who, although night had fallen when he arrived, summoned the council, tendered the Duke's thanks, and announced his speedy arrival. By desire of the new council, the monks of St. Mercurial carried the statue of the saint, in pontifical vestments, in solemn procession round the square, in token of thanksgiving for the happy event. Meanwhile the Ancients promulgated an edict which prohibited that anything belonging to Madonna be appropriated, in whatever place it might be found or hidden, under penalty of twenty-five gold ducats. Another edict protected the Jews whom the Commune would have had to indemnify in case of loss, and a third forbade damage to the recently erected barricades. Nicolò Tornielli and Ludovico Ercolani were sent to the fort to break the news as best they could, and tell how the people of Forli had been forced to open their gates to Borgia, by the cruel and unanswerable necessity of saving themselves from extermination ; not by the lack of love for their Sovereign Lady. They went to the fort in the morning, and had been immediately received by the Countess. At sunset they had not yet returned, and the city thrilled with the fear that they would never be seen again. It was told that on hearing of the surrender of Imola, the Countess had beheaded the Imolese hostages. . . . Now, in revenge for the desertion of Forli, had Madonna put these poor men to death, or imprisoned them in the dungeons of the fort ? While these horrible doubts perplexed the public mind, Tornielli and Ercolani were seen to emerge from the fort, whole and hearty, fired with enthusiasm for the Countess and delighted with her courtesy. She had insisted on learning every detail from them, had shown her pleasure in seeing them again and in questioning them on all that had happened.

Impressed as they were by Catherine's indomitable courage, they were the more grateful to her for having realized that populations are not composed of heroes, and that she could not

expect the people of Forli to expose themselves to absolute ruin for her glory and advantage. They had found her not to be shaken in her determination to resist Borgia to the end, and convinced that, in default of numbers, her daring and strength of purpose sufficed for the undertaking. Catherine had stores of costly silken stuffs from Florence, wherewith to reward the bravest of her soldiers. And before shutting herself up in the fort, she had procured some cuirasses for her own wear, being determined to throw herself into the thickest of the fight. Soon after the return of Ercolani and Tornielli the fort opened fire on the city, to the terror of the inhabitants ; a cannon-ball had fallen near to a monk of St. Francis, while he was walking in his orchard. "There is nothing to fear," said Ercolani and Tornielli : "this is not for us, but to teach the enemy that the surrender of the city has neither frightened Madonna, nor changed her purpose." A few shot grazed the palace tower and then the firing ceased.

On the following day the council drew up the conditions of surrender to the Duke, and their tenor was discussed until it reached the ears of the peasants. When the latter heard that they would have to pay the same taxes to the new government as to the old one, they armed themselves and came down upon the city in thousands, crying "*Popolo ! Popolo !*" and protesting furiously that they would never surrender to the Duke on those terms. They declared they would go to the Duke and tell him that the rich were claiming to be exempted from taxes, so that they might enjoy a life of idleness, without a care for the poor, except to suck their blood and live on their labour, and that now the time had come to free the land of all its burdens, vexations and taxes, and, once for all, to equalize the rights of poor and rich.

They were persuaded that it would be easy to induce the Duke to levy a head-tax and no more, as was the custom among the peasantry in France. The crowd, the cries and the confusion were beyond description ; the civic guard was powerless, the Ancients without resource, the palace bell tolled ominously, and the city was in a tumult. An incessant but

indefinite sound ascended to the fort, where the Countess, fearing that her unfaithful city had given itself up to all the horrors of civil war, ordered some companies of soldiers to go down and separate the contending parties and restore peace. On arriving at the parish of Ravaldino they learned the true state of affairs and turned back.

At last Bentivoglio (who had recently arrived at Forli), Luffo Numai and Tiberti, after promising the peasants that the conditions should be revised, and due consideration given to their rights and needs, succeeded in pacifying them. The conditions of surrender were therefore withheld until the following day, and then conveyed to Imola by the bishop, Monsignor dell' Aste and Dr. Giovanni dalle Selle, who had no sooner left on this errand than a courier arrived at Forli announcing the Duke's arrival for that evening. This announcement was immediately conveyed to Catherine at the fort.

At the twenty-second hour the Duke halted at the country house of Ludovico Ercolani at Casalaparra, where he received a deputation of nobles representing the Council of Forli, and, continuing his way, had the pleasure of slipping his greyhounds after a hare.

He was met at the Gate of St. Peter by the Ancients and Councillors, whom he informed that neither he nor the soldiers would enter the city on that day, but that they would proceed to San Martino. He halted to let his men pass before him, fearing that in the usual lust of pillage they might enter in despite of him. This was really attempted by several companies that arrived later ; the populace flew to arms with intent to repulse them, and Bentivoglio, Tiberti and several French captains who had been left at Forli on account of "weak health," had great difficulty in inducing them to pursue their way. The Duke had told the magistrates that he would not stay, lest his unexpected arrival should inconvenience the citizens, and this was the generally accepted belief, but the fact was that as the capitulation had not yet been signed, he did not care to run the personal risk of being

confronted with an unknown populace. He was no hero, and his care for his army was complicated by fear for his life. All the hill-side houses and villas were filled with soldiers, to whom the townspeople sent all manner of victuals, as a peace-offering.

On the following day, the commissioners returned from Imola, and presented the articles of capitulation to the Duke at San Martino. He signed them and dismissed the commissioners with two edicts—one by which peasants were required to bring in two long bundles of green wood, beams and other timber to St. Mercurial, the bearers of which were to be paid. Another prohibited the raising of the price of provisions under pretext of the arrival of his army.

Meanwhile, the Countess, undismayed by the action of her castellane at Schiavonia—who on the approach of Valentino had lost heart and surrendered the fortress to the invalided French captains—had reopened fire on the city. The shot was aimed at the houses of those she wished to punish, and at the palace tower, which for several centuries bore the traces of these missiles.

## CHAPTER XXX

### VALENTINO AT FORLI

On December 19 the Ancients were informed by the Duke's officers that he would make his entry after dinner. They were therefore requested to prepare quarters for himself and his followers.

Towards evening the whole army passed slowly through the Gate of St. Peter. The last to enter was Cæsar Borgia, preceded by the standard of the Church. He rode a white horse, his *béret* bore a long white plume, his silken coat covered a complete suit of armour and he carried a long green spear, point downwards. His personal beauty and elegance, his dark and penetrating eye, reddish beard and sinister expression, are sufficiently familiar. On his left rode the French general, Monseigneur d'Alègre, on his right rode none. The heavy rain prevented the magistracy and nobles from assembling at the city gate to receive the Duke, who took but half a turn in the square in sign of possession and then, with Louis de Bourbon, Duke of Vendôme, hastened to his quarters in the house of Luffo Numai. The continuous rain added to the confusion with which the army effected its entry. Every soldier chose his lair according to his pleasure; if a door were open, soldiers entered and with threats and violence laid hands on everything; if closed they forced it open or tore it down, and did worse when once they were inside. "Our ills," says Bernardi, "were like unto the pains of Hell."

A gang of 2000 caterers, cooks and butlers were guilty of

more villainy and robbery than the soldiers. The shop-keepers in the square could neither save their property from the theft nor their backs from the lashes of this rabble. The official palace was turned upside down, the Hall of the Ancients into a tavern and its benches burnt. The custom and guard-houses were turned into slaughter-houses. Householders and women were subjected to the most cruel violence, convents were invaded ; one of the walls of the Dominican convent was pulled down by means of iron implements. The terrified nuns screamed for help and tolled their bell, and the Duke sent them a resolute captain who, with a party of infantry, beat the wretches off.

The French general issued an edict prohibiting soldiers from approaching the nuns' cloisters under penalty of the gallows, and as violence still prevailed in other places, the Duke sent to the houses where soldiers were quartered to inquire into their misconduct, so that he might punish the guilty. The complaints of the townspeople were unceasing. One to whom no flour had been left was obliged to beg bread of his family ; another had no bed, others had neither wine nor shirts. And all and every one displayed backs, chests and heads broken and wounded by the blows of the soldiery. The Duke listened to the longest and most detailed accounts without a sign of impatience or weariness. Then he ordered the quarter-masters to reduce the number of soldiers where they were too many, to set guards over and redistribute them. Sometimes the remedy was worse than the evil, the successors than their predecessors. Then the injured persons returned with fresh complaints and grievance to the Duke, who with infinite patience and courtesy exhorted them to bear with the discomfort a little longer, in the certainty that if he continued to govern Forli he would indemnify them for every loss. He apologized for his inability to remedy the evil at once. This courtesy of manner and feeling, extraordinary in a man of the type of Cæsar Borgia, was due to the political concept that led him indifferently to do good or to commit a crime. His great benignity inspired the beaten, the injured and the robbed with resignation and confidence. Some brought their

grievances to him a third time and were listened to with the same affability. The Duke's patience was always at their service and none left him in doubt or enmity. But the greater part of his solicitude was assumed.

On being taken to task by the quarter-masters, the soldiers replied that "the Duke had given them that city to live in it as they pleased. Do the people of Forli, with their fastidiousness and whining, think that they can take from us that which has been given?" The Duke was informed of their insubordination but did not punish it; he was satisfied to be able to say that he had admonished the soldiers. On the very day that an edict forbade sacrilege, a group of French soldiers who had surrounded the crosslet in the square were regarding the statue of St. Mercurial on its altar with great attention. "What is the meaning of this poltroon of a bishop seated on the grave of Frenchmen, our ancestors?" they queried of each other. "This people have done this in our despite . . . to immortalize the victory they affect to have gained over us!" Some of them jumped on the altar and succeeded in pushing the statue into the mud, where it was rolled and battered amid the foulest oaths and curses. It would have been broken to bits but for the religious compunction of the minority who cried shame upon the ringleaders and called the monks to the rescue of their statue. Not one of the townspeople had dared to raise his voice in protest against the outrage on the image of their patron saint, the symbol of the community. After this, an edict commanded all the townspeople, including the Jews, to wear a white cross on the breast. Those who were without it were mercilessly beaten and insulted.

Artillery and ammunition continued to be passed into the city by the Gate of St. Peter. On Christmas Eve Cardinal Giovanni Borgia, legate at Bologna, entered Forli, passed the festive week with his cousin and left with the best hopes of Cæsar's success, which he was impatient to communicate to the Pope. On the following January 17 (1500), he died of poison in Milan. On Christmas Eve, while the Duke was

feasting the Cardinal's arrival, a peasant of Massalombarda, who had murdered two French slaughterers, was hanged in the square.

On the following day, Catherine hoisted the Bolognese flag on the tower of the fort (a lion on a red ground) instead of her own. This innovation disturbed the French captains, who mistook it for a Venetian flag. Cæsar Borgia, the Cardinal, Vendôme and d'Alègre began to believe in the rumour that the Venetian Republic was deserting the Holy League. The Duke's agitation was extreme. He had known Catherine in Rome, and knew also how astute and daring she was. What aim had she in view? And while he was discussing his fears with his captains they were joined by Meleagro Zampeschi, Venetian *condottiere* and Ambassador to the League. "My Lords," said Zampeschi, "let the lady wave every rag in her wardrobe at us, but be assured that my Republic has never harboured a thought of deserting the League. And I will tell you, furthermore, that Venice would not protect her if that were possible, for every time that our senate has opened its arms to her, she in her blindness and disdain has turned away." "And I," adds Bernardi, "was present when the said *condottiere* said these things."

While this matter was being discussed Catherine began to ply her artillery by way of reminding the Duke that his presence did not intimidate her. But at the offset an old piece of Italian artillery, called a *passavolante,* cast in the time of Pino Ordelaffi, burst and Catherine, thinking this was a bad omen, repented that she had opened fire on that day. "And considering," says Bernardi, "that three parts of the said people were devoted to her, and that they who had deserted her and gone over to the Duke had acted under coercion," the Countess ordered the firing to be stopped: "for she would not send Christmas greetings to her good people of Forli by the cannon's mouth."

Catherine, who at this time never went unarmed, and who was accompanied only by armed men, isolated in the expectation rather of death and destruction than victory, yet

found time, amid her daily anxieties, to write the good canons of faithless Imola—not that they should intercede for her with heaven, but to express her amazement that they had been unmindful of her desire for the appointment of a certain Don Battista de' Gentilini as sacristan. "Wherefore I say to you," she concluded, "that you are to admit and invest with the said place and office, the afore-named Don Battista, without further ado."

Meanwhile Forli was divided into two factions. One was called *Madama*, and was all for Catherine: the other, *Ordelaffi*, favoured the return of Anton Maria, who was conspiring at Ravenna. Borgia was waiting for the bombs that should make a breach in the fort, but, uncertain of success, sought a means of compromise.

The Countess held her own, foreseeing, better than any one, the inevitable end. She relied on her arms for honour's sake, but, with all the force of her genius, she strove to save herself. From a letter of the Mantuan Orator it transpires that towards the end, she had applied to the Venetians, offering them her State sooner than yield it to the Pope; recalling the services of her husband, who had deserved well at their hands and had been a patrician of Venice. Repulsed by the Venetians she had attempted to treat with the Pope, to whom she would have ceded her States and rights in return for another State in the gift of the Church, of an income of not less than 5000 ducats, and a sum of ready money to provide ammunition. But the Pope, who had no mind to give a State to any one but his son, would not treat with her, and in proportion as her case became more desperate Catherine's resistance became more dogged.

The Duke's irritation increased with every hour as Catherine, defying the enemy, harried the town with her cannon. Well-nigh exasperated, he donned his black hat with the white feather, mounted his white charger and followed by a trumpeter and a few mounted men-at-arms, rode through the town and examined the fort from every point of view, and at last stood on the moat's edge.

The trumpeter blew his trumpet: some men-at-arms appeared on the tower; the trumpeter cried that His Excellency the Duke, there present, craved a parley with Madonna the Countess, and in a few moments his fair enemy looked down from the battlements. On the arrival of Catherine, Cæsar bared his head and lowered his hat, which he held for some time with outstretched arm. Catherine saluted him courteously, as a person she recognized. The ensuing dialogue, reconstructed by latter-day historians, and imaginary in form, probably fairly represents what was said on the occasion:[1]

"Madonna! You who are learned in history, know that the fortune of States is subject to change: this is the moment to put your genius and knowledge to the test. I would fain prove to you the high esteem in which I hold you, and convince you that not only am I incapable of doing you an injury but that I am desirous to save you all possible annoyance; wherefore I entreat you, I beseech you, to surrender this fort of your own free will to me. I promise you the most advantageous conditions and will guarantee that the Pope assigns States to you and revenues worthy of yourself and your sons. You can take up your residence in Rome if it so please you. Thus you will rescue yourself and yours from a greater danger than you can be aware of; you will avoid the horrible sight of bloodshed, you will gain the reputation of a woman whose wisdom is equal to her courage, and be spared the derision with which Italy would deride one who persisted in pitting herself against overwhelming numbers. Yield! yield! Madonna! Yield to my prayers!"

Catherine, erect and motionless, listened to him without a trace of emotion on her features. When he had finished she replied—

"My Lord Duke, Fortune favours the brave and abandons the cowardly. I am daughter to one who knew no fear and am determined to walk in his steps until death. Well do I know how changeful is the fortune of States. History I have

[1] Burriel. This writer's version of the dialogue is derived from a portion of the Riario archives found by him at Bologna, but which we have been unable to trace.

read, it is true, but it would be a vile thing if I, forgetting who was my father, and who my forebears, consented to exchange my estate for that of a subject . . . . I thank you for the good opinion you say you have of me: but as for the promises you make in the Pope's name, I must perforce reply that as your father's pretexts for dethroning me and mine have been judged false, iniquitous and despicable the world over, so do I hold these promises of yours and the Pope's to be false and lying. Italy knows the value of a Borgia's word!

"My troops suffice for my defence, and I do not believe that yours are invincible. Would to God I still had the support of my uncle the Duke of Milan, then indeed there would be no doubt in the minds of men where to look for blind obstinacy, or where for true valour. If, after having refused every condition and scorned every weakness unworthy of the name of Sforza, I am crushed by you, the world shall learn that I and those whom, with me, these walls enclose, take comfort in the thought that they who die at their post are unforgotten and that often their cause survives them and triumphs."

She said: bowed to the Duke and disappeared from the battlements. Cæsar found that he had counted in vain upon the effect of his chivalrous courtesy. He knew Catherine well enough to be assured that she would have replied with equal courtesy, and hoped in this exchange of civilities to have cajoled some concession from her, instead of which she had told him to his face that she neither believed in the Pope nor in himself. He returned her salutation, put spurs to his horse and, enraged and bewildered, retired from the fort.

For many hours he pondered on his disappointment and on the risks entailed by the siege of the fort, and on the interruption of his plans. He hated to lose time and men at the bidding of a woman. How could he bend her to his will? The first attempt had failed: Catherine had been courteous, but unmoved. . . . If he tried again, with more persuasive and fiery eloquence? "The other day," writes Bernardi, "which fell on the 6th, my Lord Duke rode twice to the moat of the fort and there had speech of Madonna."

Once more the Duke rode to the fort and a second blast of the trumpet apprised Catherine that he had another word to say to her. He however but renewed the same offers and entreaties, which Catherine as resolutely refused. Cæsar told her that as she would neither trust himself nor the Pope, Monseigneur d'Alègre, the Bailli of Dijon, and the Duke of Vendôme, of the royal house of France, would be his witnesses and attest his given word. Catherine dryly replied that "where the capital was wanting the interest was of small account; if she lacked faith in himself and the Pope how could he expect his satellites to inspire it?" She turned away from him and disappeared.

Enraged at his rebuff and smarting under its insult, Cæsar never drew rein until he arrived at the camp and summoned his captains in council.

The same day Catherine also summoned hers, and when her trusty ones had assembled, thus addressed them:

"Friends and Defenders! The moment has come! The Duke has gone from here in a fury. He tried to win me by flattery, and now, having failed, will seek a horrible revenge. I have not betrayed the honour of my house, which has not yet produced vile men nor cowards . . . so that the world may now judge how the Borgia of Valencia differ from the Sforza of Milan. Fear not! We have artillery, ammunition, veteran captains and expert engineers, as well as they. We are of one mind; they are divided against themselves, and I know for a certainty that the King of France has no interest in this iniquitous conquest of Romagna.

"If, at the first assault, we succeed in repulsing the Duke's forces the French will desert him, and he will be left with the pontifical troops, who have no terrors for us. And the people of Forli, who do not dare to breathe nor raise their eyes from the ground, will rise like one man on that day and come to our aid. The Empress, my sister, is praying her husband to send help to us. What then will happen to the Duke and his army? Courage! and yet more courage! Shall we compromise with the enemy before we have measured ourselves with him? . . . The King of France cannot lend his

troops for ever, for he needs them against those my uncles Ascanio and Ludovic Sforza are collecting in Germany. Our victory will be the more glorious, inasmuch as it has no other motive than justice, our homes and nationality, and because if our numbers are inferior to the enemy, and I a helpless woman, yet am I defended by a handful of heroes. They may cut us in pieces, but our bones will cry to God for vengeance, and perchance from them will arise one who with fire and steel shall crush out this villainous brood of the Borgia. . . ."

Catherine then showed Count Alexander Sforza how she proposed placing her cannon, and her plan of defence was generally approved of. The Duke had meanwhile established two batteries, one in the open country south of the fort, the other near to the Church of St. John the Baptist, later of the Capucins. To the latter battery were conveyed seven heavy guns and ten falconets. On December 28 this artillery opened fire on the *Paradiso*, Catherine's palace, that, guarded by two ravelins, stood between the gate of the fort and the *maschio*, or fort proper. Catherine had lodged her captains in the *Paradiso*, and was herself living in the *maschio* until she was advised to remove to one of the ravelins, since the enemy's guns covered the fort. The shot aimed at the *maschio* passed over and in some cases through the upper part of the ravelin, without endangering the massive construction of its base. Without relaxing the attack on the *maschio*, some of the enemy's guns were now directed against a tower that commanded the road of San Martino.

Catherine's engineer, a certain Bartolomeo of Bologna, whom she had procured from her uncle Ludovic, replied with such precision to the French fire, that having taken aim at the French engineer he killed him at the first shot. Borgia and his captains were dismayed by the loss of a man in whose skill they had unbounded confidence. "If it were possible," said d'Alègre, "the King of France would give 10,000 crowns to restore him to life!" The soldiers, who began to fear reprisals on the part of the townspeople, induced the Duke to issue an edict by which the latter were compelled to

take all their arms to a place indicated: at the same time it was prohibited to buy stolen property of the soldiers. As the soldiery still went in fear of the townspeople a second edict ordered those who had not yet given up their arms to take them to the Gate of Schiavonia, under penalty of the gallows. A few days later a certain Giorgio Folfi was imprisoned by order of the provost-general, tried and convicted of having poisoned a French soldier who was quartered in his house. The accused was nailed to a column on the spot where the crime had been committed, and his right hand cut off; he was then decapitated in the square, and his body was hung to a chain at the custom-house and there burned.

A long line of peasants, each carrying five fascines, were daily seen to pass through the town and lay their burdens at the foot of the Fort of Ravaldino, on the hill-side, where the Duke purposed to open the breach. On December 29, a sudden cessation of firing on both sides gave rise to a rumour that Catherine's brother-in-law, Lorenzo de' Medici, had succeeded in arranging some sort of compromise with Valentino. Parenti relates that Catherine "appealed to us (the Florentines) for help and succour . . . but in vain: there was even a plan to corrupt the French captains so that they might delay operations, but the matter was itself delayed until it was too late: Madonna strained every nerve, but nothing turned to her advantage."[1]

And seeing that the French bombardiers were once more busied in setting up their batteries, the besieged realized that all they had suffered and endured, up to that moment, was but the beginning of the end.

[1] *Storie Florentine MS. Magliabechina*, t. iii. p. 208.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### THE FALL OF RAVALDINO

THE Duke, with his French and Swiss mercenaries, was eager for the assault; Catherine alone, among the princes of Europe, had attempted to stem his criminal ambition; neither prince nor power in Italy, not even her sister, the Empress of Germany, on whom she had so much depended, had come to her assistance. The prestige, bold statesmanship and military strength of the Pope had struck terror into all of them. Yet Catherine, in the hope that her sister would succeed in persuading Maximilian to come to her aid, still persisted in resisting to the last, determined either to await the imperial army or die under arms, as the sovereign of Forli.

Till late at night she took counsel with her captains, engineers and master gunners. At early morn she appeared among the soldiers, inspected the artillery, inquired what noises had been heard and visited the entire fort. From the height of the chief tower, which she had climbed to look down on her city, the enemy's camp, the ravaged and snow-clad plain, the fair amazon saw the dawn of the new century and the sun rise on January 1, 1500.

It had become known that Catherine had provided herself with chain armour to wear under her outer garments, that she threw herself into the thickest of the fight with her soldiers, and when attacked defended herself desperately, wounding several of the enemy. The French and Swiss admired her and regretted that they did not serve under her banner. She offered 5000 ducats for the body of Cæsar Borgia and

10,000 for delivering him alive into her hands. The Duke retorted by promising 100,000 for the formidable enemy who arrested his designs, alive or dead. The Pope, who pronounced the House of Sforza to be the devil's seed, desired that Catherine should be put to death as soon as she was taken. But her defenders were encouraged by the promise of the possessions of those of her subjects who had rebelled, and fired by the example of her indomitable valour and the knowledge that she would sooner die than surrender. "Never," wrote Grumello, "had been seen a woman of such spirit."

The fort was as yet uninjured by the four hundred bombs that had been thrown into it. Any damage to its outer fortifications sustained during the day was repaired by night, so that every morning found them intact; a reinforcement of four hundred Foot was expected, whence it was not known, but it was supposed from the Florentines, who supported their allies in secret when they could not do so publicly. This increased the boldness and confidence of the garrison. Sanuto, ever garrulous, relates that Catherine caused mocking and indecorous inscriptions to be graven on the shot fired into the enemy's camp, to prove to Borgia the contempt in which she held him and his.

The townspeople were distracted from their anxieties by the banquets given by the French captains, according to the custom of their country, on the first and second of the year. One given by D'Aubigny and Galvani to Monseigneur d'Alègre and other leaders, and described by Burriel, will serve as an example.

". . . Rich and abundant provision for two whole days was ordered from the country, and taken from the peasants by force or persuasion. . . . The *loggie* (terrace or verandah) of this[1] and the adjacent houses were boarded in, and there the tables were set. . . . At the appointed hour the guests arrived, followed by men of all sorts and conditions, and all proceeded to partake of the banquet standing. When they

[1] The house of Giovanni Monsignani, where d'Aubigny was quartered.

had eaten their fill, at the time dictated by their custom



WOMAN'S ARMOUR, PROBABLY MADE FOR CATHERINE SFORZA.

two of these men mounted on the tables, ran the whole length of them, breaking plates and any other fragile things,

and throwing them on the ground if they were empty of food. . . . Then appeared a long procession of men and women, conspicuous among whom was a man on horseback, wearing a long coat and a cap shaped like a mitre. These



WOMAN'S ARMOUR (*back*).

persons laughed, drank at the tables, and diverted themselves to excess, and afterwards left, arm-in-arm, to roam the streets with ribald song and jest, to the scandal of the inhabitants of Forli. . . . "

The due organization of both the attack and the defence continued. The ducal troops erected barricades, dug trenches, and provided cover for those who served the guns, while thousands of casks were filled with sand for the defences of the fort.

On the 5th the cannon again thundered on both sides, to more purpose for Borgia than for Catherine. The fort artillery killed many of the French, but the Duke's destroyed the highest defences of the chief tower and the entire upper portion of its side towers, leaving them as they appear at the present time.

On the eve of the Epiphany, although the French had fought all day, they passed the night, according to their custom, in eating and drinking, without sitting down; the Duke meanwhile was in council with his bombardiers, when they were interrupted by sudden and fearsome news. It was said that a man had escaped from the fort, and warned the Duke that while the French were carousing, the townspeople had risen under arms and were to be joined by a sortie of the garrison, and all the French were to be butchered to the last man.

Twice this fate had befallen French armies that had invaded Italy; the year 1282 had witnessed the Sicilian Vespers, and the chapel of the Crocetta or Crosslet in the square at Forli still bore witness to the almost contemporaneous extermination of French invaders at the hands of the people of Forli. Such an occurrence would not therefore be either new or improbable.

It was already past midnight when a body of French soldiers and officers came to inquire of the Duke whether there was foundation for the rumour. The Duke assured them that there was none, but many, whom he had not succeeded in reassuring, entered the houses of the townspeople to ascertain that they were in their beds and harboured no strangers. They need have had no fear, for the people of Forli, unlike their ancestors, had neither the strength nor the courage to assert themselves. The city was half empty; all had fled who could, including the priests and monks. Bernardi

relates that the Abbot of St. Mercurial had disappeared with all his monks, leaving only four to chant the Sunday vesper, and that he often found himself quite alone in the church with Andrea Numai. The only masses to be heard were those of the chaplains of the French army, which, says Bernardi, were reverently attended by the soldiers, who knelt, with crossed arms, by the officers, and especially by the captains of high rank. "There were," he adds, "many of these personages who were very spiritual, and who visited the churches every day." January 8 was a memorable day. A lighted torch shone from the roof of one of the principal houses in the town and another gleamed from the fort. "Treason, treason!" cried the French, who seized their arms and poured in serried ranks into the square, threatening to tear the people of Forli to pieces unless they explained the meaning of the two torches. The townspeople could give no explanation of them, and the rage of the French increased. At last a German was moved to confess that he had lighted a torch on the top of a dovecot, with no other object than to steal the doves.

The siege had already lasted twenty days, and it seemed as if Catherine's fortitude kept pace with the increasing impatience of the Duke. The French and Swiss, who at first were intoxicated with their easily won victories in Lombardy, began to weary and lose confidence in themselves. The Duke reviewed them all and distributed higher pay. Meanwhile the ten guns that covered the fort had, after working day and night, made two breaches in the curtain or outer wall; but the besieged (since the destruction of the crown and battlements of the chief and two lateral towers) assembled behind the wall that stood behind the two breaches, and from there offered a desperate resistance. The ducal bombardiers then directed their attack against the remaining wall, and when they had destroyed it the whole fort, from one bastion to another, was exposed and unprotected.

Catherine ordered defences to be raised to replace the external wall, but her men were under the direct fire

of the Duke's falconets, so that nearly every shot was fatal. The material of the ruined wall had partly fallen into the inner courtyard of the fort, and partly into the moat, which it half filled, thus facilitating the passage of the besiegers. On the 12th an edict was "cried" that those who loved the Duke should each carry a fascine to the defences. Many were then carried and many had already been collected. Two boats arrived opportunely on the same day from Ravenna to serve as a bridge where the water was still high, so that at midday the passage of the deep wide moat was all but assured to the assailants.

At noon, the Duke dined. In sitting down to table, he expressed his satisfaction with the people of Forli for having brought so great a quantity of fascines, and then, turning to the officers who were his guests, said—"To-day it is Sunday; you will see that on Tuesday Madonna Caterina will be in my hands."

Some of the guests opined that the date was a little too near, and as Borgia repeated that on Tuesday the beautiful Countess would be his prisoner, and the others persisted in their opinion, the matter was settled by a bet of three hundred ducats on either side. The determination with which the Duke maintained his prophecy inspired the foot soldiers who were waiting on him to say—

"Your Lordship will win the wager, for the appointed time suffices for our courage to take the fort;" all of which became known in the army and increased its ardour. The Duke's infantry fearlessly rushed close up to the fort to prevent the besieged from working at their defences, and the fort was soon riddled through and through.

Catherine perceived that the fall of the Cotogni ravelin was imminent, yet did not for a moment think of surrender; she placed a battery[1] in the courtyard of the fort and protected it as best she could with beams and barrels filled with sand. The miserable condition of the besieged provoked the insults of the besiegers, who in derision dragged

[1] Burriel describes seven iron and four bronze cannon that were found by some convicts working in the courtyard of the castle of Ravaldino in 1795.

benches, shovels, spades and mattocks to the edge of the moat, crying—"Courage, cowards; what are you doing in hiding? Come out and show your faces!"

The sentinel of the *maschio,* seeing that a multitude of the enemy thronged the edge of the moat, thought that the assault had begun, and running towards the citadel, cried in a loud voice—"*Su! Su!* Up! Up! Beloved Madonna, with your great genius assemble the garrisons, for the enemy have begun the assault!" at the same time crying to the squadrons: "*Su! Su!* the enemy is upon us!" At the sentinel's alarm the garrison hastened to take up positions where and how they could, on the ground between the moat and the ravelin *Della Montagna*, where Catherine was.

The Duke, by inciting the men to persist in carrying beams and fascines, had hourly made the moat more navigable. Some braved the risk of drowning by clinging to floating fascines; one of them gained the ravelin, climbed the wall and entered it without opposition. He was followed by others, sixteen for every fascine, and climbing the ruined wall mounted by the remains of the chief staircase that connected the *maschio* with the curtain or outer wall; then with the help of ladders they swarmed the roofs and climbed to the top of the great tower, above which hung Catherine's flag. A Swiss, named Cupizer, tore it down, and waving it towards the soldiers on the other side of the moat, cried: "Come! The victory is ours! Behold the enemy's flag!"

All this took place in sight of the battery that was in the courtyard. Why did it not open fire on the invaders? Where were the garrison?

Hence the suspicion that Giovanni da Casale, captain of all the fortifications within the *Paradiso,* had betrayed Catherine, which appears in so many contemporary histories. An obscure passage in Bernardi hints at treachery without defining it—"The fort was taken," he says, "'twixt seeing and not seeing."

In a "justification," legally drawn up and signed "*Manu-*

*propria*," [1] Giovanni da Casale, first accused of being Catherine's lover, and later her betrayer, refutes this calumny and recalls the indecision of Alexander Sforza, and the internal discord and the insubordination to which he ascribes the taking of the fort. He was ready to confound those who, "lying in their throats," had called him traitor; there were indeed those whose interests and obligations in that undertaking were higher than his; yet had they shirked their duties and then become his calumniators. The names of those persons he would not for the present divulge, but later he would reveal them. His allegations and the assertions he makes with regard to the supreme command that had devolved on Alexander Sforza, as brother of the Countess, bear the impress of truth. For the rest, Machiavelli, a contemporary, cognizant of the place, has explained better than any other how the fort was lost, and why a fort does not suffice for the defence of a State.

The Fort of Forli, says Machiavelli, in his *Art of War*, was badly constructed, and Casale, instead of defending the first breach made by the Duke's cannon, incautiously scattered his troops in too many separate places. The enemy occupied the connecting bridges, thus cutting off the besieged from one another, and in this wise nothing remained of the high emprise of Catherine, save the admirable example of her courage.

The flag taken by Cupizer had been seen by all the enemy's men on the other side of the moat, and the inspiring news soon reached the ears of the Duke, who immediately ordered the passage to be made secure, the trumpets to sound and all his forces called to the assault.

Catherine, desperate but undaunted, exasperated by the vile lethargy of her men, ordered the powder magazine to be fired, being prepared to be blown up with the walls of her fort. But the leaders of the garrison had lost heart and thought of little else than saving their own lives, fearing

[1] *Florentine State Archives*, Med. a. Pr. Cart. Priv. f. 99, 81 (Private Papers of the Medici).

less the enemy's onslaught than the extreme resolutions of the Countess. Catherine was not obeyed in time, so that when at last the ammunition exploded, it but helped to fill up the moat with *débris* for the enemy's passage. Giovanni da Casale, who had declared that he would be the last to leave the defences that had been confided to him, crept into a tower into which he let the enemy crowd in great numbers. When he thought it would hold no more, he set fire to the last of the ammunition and fled by a secret stair.

Friends and enemies perished in the flames. "The fire," says Bernardi, "reached the heavens, and many of our own, with Germans, Swiss and French, were consumed, for they had entered a place to which there was no exit."

This act naturally exasperated the enemy, who no longer restrained themselves from slaughter and every possible cruelty that they could perpetrate on the besieged.

When the smoke had cleared, the bulk of the enemy passed over the *débris* in the moat and occupied the bridges leading to the citadel; the sounds of battle mingled with the cries of the unhappy wretches who had been trapped in the explosion of the tower. Cremona, castellane of the fort, committed an act on his side more desperate than that of Casale on the side of the *Paradiso*. The terrified, tardy, and perhaps unfaithful executor of Catherine's daring order, he set fire to the stores of saltpetre and charcoal in the tower that faced Cesena, but let all his soldiery escape in disorder and alarm, thus offering a free passage to the enemy, who seeing the smoke and the flight of the besieged began to cry: "Onward! onward! The enemy has evacuated the fort! this is the day of victory!"

The soldiers of the garrison howled, wept and cursed, but henceforward they neither fought nor resisted. Catherine at that moment appeared from the *maschio*, the heart and highest point of the fort, a square tower with smooth walls, inaccessible to the scalers, and her last refuge.

Who, near to her who had thrown herself heart and soul into the *mêlée*, would dare to have been a coward? Near to her, courage once more woke to action, and terror changed to

the most desperate heroism: the garrison fell into position, closed its ranks and fearlessly hurled itself against the enemy that with ever-increasing numbers and daring, continued to pass the moat and crowd the citadel. There was no longer time to meditate on the art of defence; the only possible thought was to meet force with force, to withstand the enemy a little longer and fall with honour. The highest chiefs, the poet Marullo, Angelo Laziosi, Testadora, Captain of the Murata, mingled with the soldiery, fighting by their side. Count Alexander and Catherine's two other brothers swept in blind fury amid the enemy, while Catherine, armed from head to foot, was ever in front of the battle, inspiring her men with courage by word and deed. She was soon recognized by the French and Swiss, who would have seized her but for the fury with which they were always met by her zealous defenders. "For many days past," wrote Cardinal Sanseverino to the ex-Duke of Milan, "Count Alexander, and sometimes the Countess, had made sorties, and both had killed many French." But now they were so crowded in a narrow space that no freedom of movement was possible to them; at their feet the dead were heaped up, they could not have moved a step without treading on them.

The flood of assailants swelled unceasingly, and after an hour's fighting the besieged knew that their tardy efforts must be unavailing. Yet, excited by the voice and example of Catherine, who continued to defend herself with the courage of despair, they fought for another hour. Four hundred and seventy-five corpses (the French chronicles say seven hundred) and many more wounded, strewed the ground. Catherine, seeing that it was no longer possible to beat back the enemy with steel, ordered fire to be set to the heaped-up fascines in the fort and citadel, hoping to put them to flight . . . to arrest them by a wall of fire . . .

This time she was promptly obeyed; the fascines smoked, crackled and soon threw up the first line of fire. But the wind turned, and with it the glare of the flames and dense columns of smoke were beaten back on the defenders

and stopped their fighting. When the smoke cleared, Catherine, followed by a little band of heroes—who no longer thought of defending the fort, but of saving only her—pressed onward and succeeded in re-opening the combat, when Giovanni da Casale, who till then had doggedly defended the *Paradiso*, raised the white flag, inopportunely and without Catherine's order.

At that sight there were cries, joy, indescribable excitement among the men of Valentino, and among those of Catherine such profound discouragement and surprise that Alexander Sforza and the other leaders, finding that the paralyzed soldiers no longer obeyed them, perforce surrendered unconditionally to the enemy.

It was the hour of sunset.

The signal of surrender was repeated by tying a white kerchief to the end of a lance, which was fastened to a mast in the citadel, and the battle was at an end. But in their savagery, the Germans, French and Swiss continued to kill and mutilate[1] soldiers and inhabitants. Many of the wounded were barbarously killed, many succeeded in crawling to a hiding-place, where for lack of succour they miserably perished. All through that night, the German, French and Swiss mercenaries continued to pillage, kill and ruin. Among other things they destroyed was the fine bronze monument, recently erected by Catherine to the memory of Giacomo Feo.

The space was filled with smoke, blood, cries of menace, cries of prayer, and the groans of the dying. "For," says Bernardi, "it was the Devil's turn to reign in Paradise."

[1] The besiegers ripped up the bellies of the wounded to search for gems or coin among their intestines.

# CHAPTER XXXII

## CÆSAR VICTORIOUS

It is written in the chronicles of Jean d'Autun, the monkish biographer of Louis XII., "*Comment dame Katherine Sforce fut prize, comme une preuse Thamaris (qui) vigoureusement se maintenait, et aux plus desvoyez ennuys de sa perverse fortune, d'une joyeuse chère couvrant le dueil de son infélicité, donnoit a ses gens cueur et hardement par audacieux langage. . .*" The French, indeed, wondered that neither the luck nor the daring of the enemy, nor the cowardice of her own people could draw from her a sign of dismay or remorse, and the Italians gloried in the amazement of aliens. "Madonna," writes Parenti in his Italian Histories, "entrenched herself in the Fort and right nobly defended herself: hence the popular saying that when the French thought that they would be confronted by men, they found a woman, and when they thought to encounter a woman, they found a man."

The Italian chronicles narrate that after giving the word for the assault, the Duke returned to the city by the Gate of Ravaldino and kept himself under cover as long as the action lasted. Hearing that Catherine had determined on making a sortie with the whole garrison, and on fighting her way through the besiegers, Borgia gave the order for all the cavalry and several companies of Foot to draw up in line of battle in front of the defence.

There was therefore no chance of escape for Catherine, who could neither hold the fort nor leave it. The various stages of the attacks in their order of occurrence, already assuring his

triumph, were announced to the Duke. Casale had shown the white flag, nearly all the leaders and their men had laid down their arms, but so long as Catherine had not surrendered there was still danger. The ruinous walls, riddled by shot and damaged by explosions, might fall alike on besiegers and besieged, under them lay seven hundred corpses ; the garrison was exhausted. But among those smoking ruins, Catherine lived and moved, exercising an irresistible fascination on the remains of her army. Now and again she inspired new courage, developed a new scheme of resistance and with



FORT OF RAVALDINO : PRESENT DAY.

sudden, desperate resolve, struck terror into the hearts of her assailants.

Though the fort had fallen, more blood would have to flow ere the victors could take possession of it, unless the indomitable woman were subdued. It was manifest that, even if she persisted in resistance, she could but lead her men to certain death, without advantage to her cause or her honour. Cæsar, therefore, having ascertained that he might approach the fort without danger, mounted his horse and stood under the battlemented corridor that faced the Cotogni Gate, where he knew he would find Catherine.

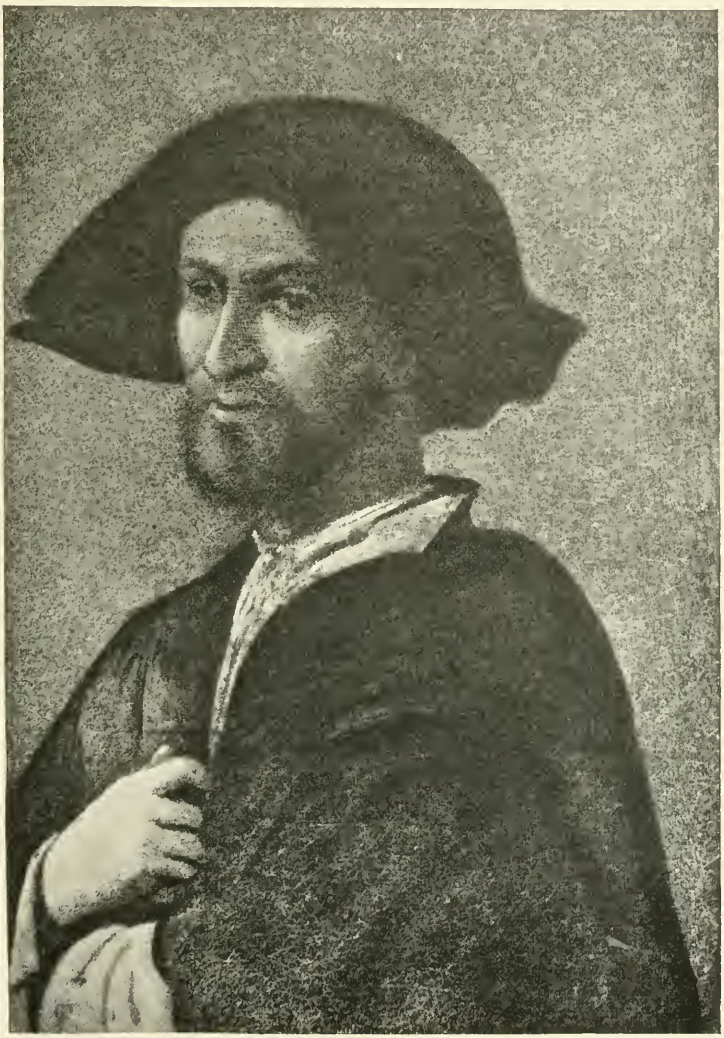
The sinister din of the onslaught was interrupted by a few shrill and rapid trumpet calls, which summoned the Countess

to a parley. Catherine appeared at a little window of the tower that overlooked that part of the castle known as the *Inferno*, because it was here that justice, in the form of torture, was done to offenders. The Duke, without dismounting, courteously prayed her to surrender, so that he might control his soldiers' greed and thirst of blood. Unless she surrendered, there was no knowing where the slaughter might stop. He entreated her to consider the garrison and the poor people of Forli who were within the walls and, while there was yet time, to prevent the needless butchery of her defenders.

According to Oliva, Catherine, "saddened by the pass to which she had come, could not reply as she would fain have done," because in that moment she was taken prisoner. But Bernardi, the barber historian (surnamed Novacula), who was either present or not far from the spot, narrates that on hearing from the lips of Borgia of the imminent holocaust of her people, she was terrified, moved and softened, and in her emotion replied to Borgia not with her usual acerbities, but "with many soft words . . . saying: 'My Lord Duke, I am with thee!' . . ." but gave no sign of surrender. This was probably the moment in which Catherine appealed to the besiegers not to sully their victory by useless bloodshed in a speech recorded by Jean d'Autun beginning, "*O vous, belliqueulx Françoys . . . puisque Fortune incertaine m'a, par vostre pouvoir submise et dombtée. . . .*" This address may be founded on words really spoken by Catherine, and turned by the chronicler in a form flattering to the self-love of his compatriots. At this moment a German or Gascon, named Bernhardt or Bertram (captain, constable or free-lance of Antoine Bissey, Bailli of Dijon), one of the first to enter the citadel, who had found himself, after the assault, close to the bridge, arrived with twelve Gascons and eight Germans at the ravelin that faced the Cotogni Gate which Catherine had just entered. Near to her were her confessor, her secretary, Evangelista Monsignani of Imola, and several brave and faithful women.

The Countess, who leaned forward to speak with some one

below (in the act of appealing to the humanity of the conquerors), while the Duke gazed upwards as if he could not take



CÆSAR BORGIA.

his eyes from her face, was immediately recognized by her commanding figure and fine presence, and Captain Bertrand,

surprised to find her deserted by her guards, cried—"Madam, you are the prisoner of my Lord the Bailli of Dijon." At these words, which were accompanied by the pressure of a heavy mailed hand on her shoulder, the Countess turned, neither offering opposition nor reply, and was seen to incline herself "with careless grace, in courteous salutation to the Duke," as who should say: "It is finished!"

Bonoli here differs from the narration of other historians, "but," he says, "I am guided by contemporary manuscripts." He adds that the astute Catherine, in the act of being taken, remembered that the laws of France prohibited the holding of women as prisoners of war, and with admirable presence of mind declared to her captor, that she surrendered to the Bailli of Dijon—to the French, but not to Cæsar Borgia, who stood below—confiding her person and her honour to the honour of the King of France.

Then, without uttering another word, "she with sovereign dignity[1] allowed herself to be led by the German to a place in the citadel known as the *Tinello*."

Neither Catherine in her retreat in the *maschio*, nor Borgia who stood below, then knew that the bridge leading to the strongest part of the fort had been already stormed. It was only while she was being led to the *Tinello* that she realized the completeness of her defeat. The enemy had turned her cannon and culverins against her own men, who here and there, worn out and stupefied, quietly surrendered to the assailants, while others pointed to the white flag that Casale had unfurled, and others, again, threw down their arms with heartrending cries for mercy.

Among them were forty admirably armed men-at-arms, who were recognized by the men of Valentino. They had arrived at the Duke's camp habited as pilgrims on their way to the Roman Jubilee. Now the Jubilee was a matter of supreme importance to papal politics and finance, and for this reason the Duke had received the pious company with words of praise, and given it God-speed on its departure, in the hope that its example would attract other pilgrims by the way.

[1] Burriel, iii. 801.

The pretended pilgrims had slowly departed to the sound of their own psalmody ; on leaving the camp they were seen to approach the fort, where a door had suddenly opened through which they rushed in. Whether bombardiers or pikemen, they had evidently been sent to Catherine's relief by the Duke of Milan or the Florentines. They were picked out from the rest of the garrison and disposed of by the swords and partisans of the men of Valentino.

According to the Italian chronicles, Borgia waited some time before he ventured to set foot in the interior of the fort, contenting himself with riding round it and demanding an account of what had happened from those he met. At last, when he was certain that neither surprise nor treachery awaited him, when he saw his banners and those of France flying over every tower, then only did he make up his mind to enter, after securing the company and protection of the Captain-general of the French forces[1] by his side. He rode through the breach on the south side, followed by a troop of Lanzichenecchi [2] and other soldiers greedy for booty. The French chronicles maintain, on the contrary, that he had insisted on exposing himself in action with the other leaders, but that when he set foot among the fascines and *débris* in the moat, the water came up to his knees, *ce qui le refroidid moult.*

It was night, and torches lighted the way of Borgia and d'Alègre, until they found themselves in the presence of the Countess, who rising when the Duke was announced, without a sign " of pomp nor anger, but with loyal frankness," declared herself his prisoner. With her were Antonio Baldraccani, her chancellor, Giovan Giacomo and Giovanni da Carpi, her trusty cup-bearers and some ladies, among whom was the wife of Dionisio Naldi, the heroic defender of the Fort of Imola, with her children.

This meeting of Cæsar Borgia with Catherine has been

[1] Monseigneur d'Alègre.

[2] The Lanzichenecchi (from the German *Lanzknecht*) play a conspicuous part in all contemporary stories of Italian warfare.

described in many ways. According to some historians, the officer of the Bailli of Dijon presented the Countess to the Duke as his share of the spoil, receiving in return from him a purse of two hundred gold ducats. According to Sanuto, Captain Bernhardt or Bernard demanded the 20,000 ducats that had been set on her head, but Cæsar replied that he would give 2000 and no more. Then the captain, "in a white heat of anger, drew his sword, crying—'So wilt break thy word to me?' making as if he would cut off the poor lady's head in the presence of the said Duke."

Malapiero, on the other hand, says that the captain "unsheathed his dagger to slay him (Borgia), but being held back Don Cæsar escaped (with his life)." Sanuto avers that the Duke put an end to the discussion by promising the captain 5000 ducats in ready money.

The Italian chronicles further relate that Borgia and d'Alègre conversed with Catherine for an hour and it was two o' clock, after midnight, when Borgia proposed to her to accompany him to his lodging in the citadel. She had not the alternative of refusal. With Valentino by her side, followed by two trusty members of her household, a lady in waiting, named Argentina, and seven or eight maids of honour, Catherine crossed the inner courtyard of the fort. It was heaped up with dead and she could not pass without treading upon them. She had seen certain parties of infantry seek refuge there as in a place of safety; she had seen them throw down their arms and beg for mercy, and before her lay the bodies of those who had not succeeded in making their escape. Unmoved by the sinister spectacle, "Madonna," says Machiavelli, "among the dead, said that she regretted the living," thus justifying the saying of Sanuto: "*Femine quasi virago crudelissima e di gran animo.*" Yet the exclamation was hardly uncalled for, seeing the cowardly and inexplicable lethargy of some of the men-at-arms and artillery, which had enabled the enemy to effect an entrance and lower her flag without firing a shot or making a movement to prevent it. Looking down on those corpses, Catherine remembered the cowards who had escaped.

It is recorded that Count d'Aubigny—who six years before had known Catherine in Romagna—kept apart and refused to appear among the combatants, alleging that a special respect restrained him from any offence to her. And d'Alègre, fascinated by Catherine's beauty, courage and gentle manners, became from that day one of her staunchest defenders. After crossing the other courtyards, Catherine, leaning on the arms of Borgia and d'Alègre, slid down through the breach until by this rugged and ruinous way she arrived at the moat. "Here," adds Bernardi, "our poor unhappy Lady was obliged to wade through the water."

On January 12, 1500, Catherine, followed by her ladies, entered the house of Luffo Numai as the prisoner of Cæsar Borgia. This disappearance was the signal for the maddened soldiery to abandon themselves to the vilest cruelty. Two of them having found her confessor and her secretary, Monsignani, called upon them to surrender. "We are at your orders," replied Monsignani, whose politeness disarmed the soldiers. They contented themselves with taking from them the money found on their persons, and gave them their liberty. They were then fallen upon by another rapacious band, who demanded money of them: "Now I have nothing, but in a few hours, as soon as I am set free, I will give you a hundred ducats." "Peace, peace!" added the friar. "He is a rich youth, the son of wealthy merchants." This he kept repeating to induce the soldiers to let them go. That was the worst thing he could have done, for the mercenaries began to fight over Monsignani, crying—"If I cannot get him you shall not have him;" and suiting the action to the words stabbed him until he died in the confessor's arms. The unhappy friar was tied to a horse's tail.

The sacking of the fort had lasted for a day and two nights (from Sunday to Tuesday) when the Duke, to make an end of it, turned the soldiers out by force, destroyed the drawbridge and threatened to hang any one *ipso facto*, who attempted to re-enter. The dead were buried; two hundred and eighty were carried to a grave dug for them in the sacristy of the

Dome and all the others to the Church of the Servi. A few months later, the Duke rebuilt the curtain or outer wall where his cannon had made the first breach, and in the centre of the new wall he set his armorial bearings, carven in stone, as they remain to this day.

Catherine, imprisoned in the Duke's quarters in Casa Numai, excited universal sympathy. The Castle of Forli had, by an effort of her will, been the only one in Italy to resist the Franco-papal expedition under Borgia. Catherine, deserted by her subjects and allies, had succumbed, but it was patent to all that had any one stirred on her behalf, hers would have been the victory. The French captains who saw her in Borgia's lodging wondered to find her always calm, patient and dignified with her conquerors. She spoke little and asked for nothing for herself. The fact that she did not assume the character of a heroine proved her heroism and accentuated its enduring quality, and the victors were in turn vanquished by the strength of her imperturbable serenity.

The courtesy at first displayed by Cæsar to the prisoner, who was destined to become his victim, suddenly changed to the grossest cruelty and perfidy, and the Duke boasted openly that the fortune of war had given not only the fort, but the woman, into his power.

Although Machiavelli has chosen to create his type of the Italian Regenerator on the model of Cæsar Borgia, the latter was in reality but a brigand, who carried to their utmost limits the profanation of the sanctuary, bad faith in politics and insensibility to any form of human suffering.

Assassination was the favourite means of this villain, whose ends were enormous crimes, masked and ennobled by the glamour of the past, their very enormity and the illustrious names with which they are concerned. In lieu of military valour or a consistent political system there was an immeasurable, shameless thirst of power that worked its way in blood, violence and treachery. Cæsar Borgia assured himself of the

stability of his conquests by the extermination of princes, and the torture, poisoning and drowning of their offspring. It was not enough for him to have taken the city and Castle of Forli; he must have Catherine in his power, and with her he must have Octavian and the younger Riario children. The plant must be torn up by the roots—he had the eagle, but had yet to capture the eaglets, who might one day learn the use of their claws.

The distance between one place and another, the difficulty of communication, the few letters that were written in those days, made it possible to do many things unknown to the enemy. Cæsar doubted not that Catherine had shut herself up in the fort with all her children, and on its surrender sent his myrmidons, like hounds after their prey, in search of the Riario children. It had been useless for Catherine to aver that they would not find her children there—so natural was it that she should wish to hide them from the conqueror that she was not believed—and only after an exhaustive search in the fort, city and suburbs was the Duke informed that the children of Madonna were really not to be found. This was a blow to Cæsar. The possession of Forli and its fort, without that of its whole reigning family, seemed to him no better than an empty purse, the chief scope of the expedition had failed, leaving in its place a continuous danger and menace. Spite, rage, humiliation, every low and cruel instinct possessed him . . . he summoned and interrogated Catherine. Then it was that the conquered princess met him as a victorious mother, victrix over violence and every form of human treachery. "Her children? Had she not told him that they were safe under the protection of the Florentine Republic? Should she have kept them as a target for his cannon, or give them with her own hands as food for wolves? . . ."

God or the Devil had helped this woman to defeat his ends, and the Duke swore that she should suffer for it, in her fair body and indomitable soul, and that he would make her an object of contempt to the populace and soldiery who revered and admired her. He gave out that Catherine had defended

her fort better than her virtue, but a document[1] in the Vatican mentions the "cruel tortures" inflicted on her, and Bernardi narrates that "our poor unhappy Madonna, the said Catherine Sforza, so beautiful in person, endured grievous bodily injustice." Sanuto tells[2] how in rage at having lost the fruit of his victory, Cæsar vented his spite on the mother who had snatched her children from his clutches and, "after cruel torments, dragged her with him, as a trophy of his victory and in contempt of her noble lineage . . . he was infuriated with the result of the expedition."

Meanwhile the Bailli of Dijon, Captain of the Swiss soldiery, had gained no material advantage by the capture his officer had effected, and he resolved to tear Catherine from the claws of Borgia and exact the promised ransom. Although contemporary historians differ as to the sum stipulated, it was a matter of some importance which had nearly cost the prisoner her life and which could not long be ignored. On January 21, "at the second hour," when all was in readiness for the advance on Pesaro, the Bailli of Dijon, with three hundred men-at-arms, awaited the Duke at a corner of the street he was about to pass with Catherine, and curtly informed him that he had come to take the Countess from him because "he held it to be to his shame" that she who had confided in the laws of France should, in their despite, be held a prisoner. Cæsar was daring in state-craft and in war, in the commands he issued to others, but prudent with regard to his own person. He did not therefore attempt to oppose the determined man who surrounded by his doughty men-at-arms, now faced him and whom Catherine, in the hope of a speedy release, promptly followed to his quarters in Casa Paolucci.

The Duke, who was anxious to hand Catherine over to the Pope, so that Alexander VI. might fulfil his latest intention

[1] "Il Valentino . . . imprigionò Caterina loro Madre, donna di rara bellezza ed ottime qualita. . . . Taccio quello che osò di fare il Duca Valentino a questa Donna Nobilissima. . . ." *Vita di Rodrigo Borgia* (Alessandro VI.), e del Duca Valentino suo figliuolo.—Roma. Bibl. Casauatense. Cod. E. iv. 23 curt. sec. xvii.

[2] Sanuto, *Vita di Papa Alessandra Sesto*, *Bibliotecu Vaticana*. Cod. Curt. no. 1676, c. 113.

of prosecuting her, fearing that the Bailli might refuse to give her up to him, sent a courier post haste to Monseigneur d'Alègre at Forlimpopoli. Towards five o'clock Monseigneur d'Alègre dismounted at the Duke's quarters. They passed the night in discussion, but did not come to any decision because the Duke, who was afraid that the Bailli might lay violent hands upon him, decided that they should all meet in the square on the following day to come to some arrangement.

After dinner on the following day, the Duke, the Bailli, Vendôme and d'Alègre were seen to pace the square, discussing what was to be done with the Countess. The Bailli was furious that Madonna had been given up to Valentino as his prisoner, inasmuch as the laws of France prohibited the imprisonment of women taken in war; neither did they permit them to be treated with violence or discourtesy. The Countess had surrendered to the French, she had been captured by one of his officers . . . on his honour, he could not leave her to the mercy of the Duke. The Countess was temporarily in his charge: this was his affair, but not that of the Duke.

"Who then," queried Borgia, "is the supreme leader of this war? In whose name have you fought? This war has been undertaken in my name, not in that of the King of France, whose men are but my auxiliaries: and if mine be the fruits of victory, mine the cities and the forts that have fallen, mine also are the prisoners of war." Here the Bailli and the Duke hurled offensive epithets at each other, and the Bailli sent an officer to summon his Swiss to the square, who arriving fully armed, raised aloft their spears and banners and drew up in front of the palace. The townspeople, who had crowded to the spot to see the end of the contest between the Duke and the Bailli, ran back to shut themselves up in their houses, or to let themselves down by the ramparts on the arrival of the troops, fearing to be torn to pieces by them.

D'Alègre now offered his services as mediator on the following terms: Madame Catherine Sforce would be no man's prisoner, but would remain subject to the King of France, who alone was arbiter of her fate. Meanwhile the

Bailli would restore the Countess to the Duke, who would keep her "in deposit" in the Pope's name, and on this understanding would conduct her to Rome. The Countess was on no account to be considered nor treated as a prisoner. The Duke would pay the Bailli the "pay and a half" due to him for his soldiers. D'Alègre to be surety for both parties.

The Bailli immediately dismissed his men from the square, and returning to his quarters reconducted Catherine and her ladies to those of the Duke. To this the latter assented without a murmur, because she did not know what fate was in store for her until she found herself in the anteroom of the Duke's lodging, not realizing that her deliverer had been bought by the payment of the Duke's debt to betray his victim and drag her back to the apartment of Valentino. Machiavelli thus summarizes the situation. "The possession of Madonna was disputed by the Swiss and the Duke. She was sold to Valentino." Bernardi describes Catherine's dress on that occasion, which was of black satin made "*à la turque*," with a muslin veil to bind her hair. When she found herself once more in the Duke's rooms, she offered a desperate resistance, and a violent altercation ensued. The Bailli put forward the inexorable necessity of circumstances as his excuse, once more assuring the Countess that she had bettered her condition, being now no longer Cæsar's prisoner, but under his care and the protection of the King of France.

On the following morning a trumpeter paced the streets, giving the signal of departure to all soldiers quartered in the town. But these adventurers were so comfortably lodged in the houses of the townspeople that the shrill blast of the trumpet failed to call them from their beds, and as usual it had to be supplemented by the threat of the gallows. At last the men-at-arms filed through the Gate of St. Peter, but the Swiss and Germans, who had halted in the square, demanded their money. These soldiers of Antoine de Bissey, Bailli of Dijon, secretly instigated by their master, had mutinied. The Duke indignantly declared that they should have no pay until they arrived at Cesena, and as the tumult continued, threat-

ened to toll the great bell and have them all cut to pieces by the peasantry. On this menace they departed. The Duke, attended by his captains, went to the mass of the Holy Ghost at the Dome and received the oath of allegiance of the four deputies, who were to renew it at the feet of the Pontiff.

A Spaniard, named Gonzalo Mirafuentes, was appointed Castellane of Ravaldino and the notorious Remiro de Lorqua, Governor of Imola and Forli. The latter, on whom later it suited Valentino to concentrate the odium of his own

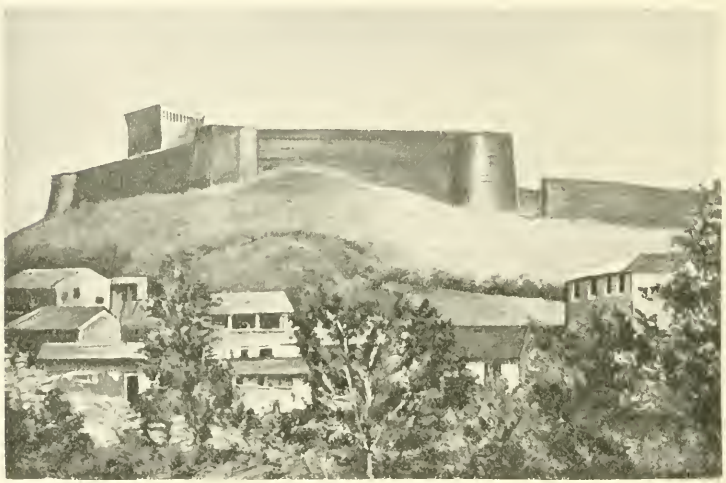


CASTLE OF MALATESTA, OR MURATA.

enormities, was beheaded at Cesena in the square between the citadel and the fort of that city. The body, covered with insignia and decorations, stretched on a mat, and the head stuck on a lance, were exhibited all day, both as a terror-inspiring spectacle and an example of the Duke's justice and love for his subjects. Cæsar designated him as guilty of all the violence, murder and rapine that had been perpetrated, but chiefly of tampering with the sale of corn, whereby the populace had been starved and himself mulcted of enormous sums for its importation and distribution to the soldiery and people.

On Thursday, January 23, Cæsar Borgia, with Catherine

riding between himself and d'Alègre, left Forli, preceded by his whole army. The square and the streets were crowded by people who had come to gaze on their proud Lady in the guise of a prisoner, who, says Bernardi, slowly advanced on her white palfrey, followed by her two faithful servitors and the two ladies who always accompanied her. Catherine's eyes were wet and swollen, and gently she responded to the salutations of her people . . . "as if to take a last farewell of them." And the crowd wept as they looked upon her.



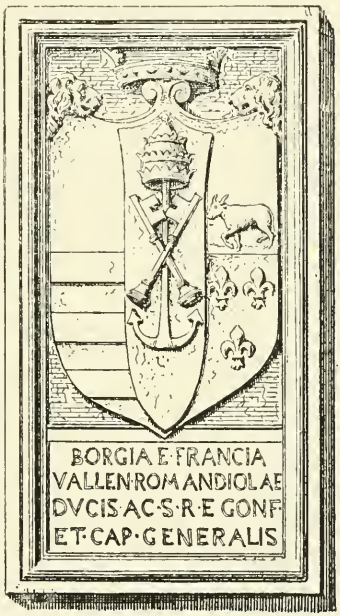
CASTLE OF MALATESTA, OR MURATA (*another view*).

The Duke halted at Forlimpopoli, where after visiting its fort and walls he received the oaths of allegiance in the Church of St. Peter, arriving towards evening at Cesena, where with his prisoner and the whole of his artillery he took up his quarters at the *Murata*. That night he added to Catherine's misery by never leaving her out of his sight and by encouraging every report that could increase her humiliation. Time, however, avenged and refuted these calumnies.

Monseigneur d'Alègre chivalrously dedicated himself to

Catherine's service, and temporarily saved her from further insult by offering to be her custodian in the *Murata*, when Cæsar left for the conquest of Pesaro, promising to give her up to him when he was ready to leave Romagna for Rome.

From Cesena, Cæsar Borgia proceeded to Santarcangelo and there he stayed to mature his plan for the conquest of Pesaro, when two couriers from Lombardy brought d'Alègre instructions to hasten to meet Ludovico Sforza, who had arrived at Como with a body of troops collected with the help of Maximilian, Emperor of Germany.



ARMS OF CÆSAR BORGIA.

The arrival of the Moro, supported by German soldiery, seemed a presage that the fortunes of the House of Sforza would revive, as by enchantment, and it was rumoured that Octavian Riario had re-entered Forli and dealt summarily with the rebels. This news had no effect on Catherine. A few days earlier this imperial support, nay, even the rumour of it, would have sufficed to save her; now it was too late. And the worst of it was that she would be deserted by d'Alègre, who was obliged to march his soldiers against the Germans in Lombardy without delay.

Bound by his compact and his given word, d'Alègre could not do less than replace Catherine in the care of Borgia, and having confided her to a French captain and some trusty men-at-arms, it fell to his lot to tear the unhappy woman from her last refuge and witness her disconsolate departure for the camp of Cæsar.

The departure of d'Alègre and the French troops caused

Cæsar to renounce the conquest of Pesaro for the moment, and having despatched Hercules Bentivoglio with five hundred men-at-arms, and the Spaniard Cardona, with three hundred lances, for the defence of the Fort of Forli, he turned his horse's head towards Rome, dragging Catherine with him.

# CHAPTER XXXIII

## THE PRISONER OF WAR

THE Roman diaries that minutely describe the triumphal entry of Duke Valentino make no mention of the presence of Catherine, who yet, according to some of her biographers, figured therein, bound in golden chains, thus renewing the spectacle of Queen Zenobia in the days of the Emperor Aurelian.

"Valentino entered Rome," says Bonoli, "leading Catherine adorned with golden chains, in triumph, prouder of having subdued this woman than of any of the most redoubtable warriors." Justolo in his panegyric of Borgia narrates that the procession moved slowly on account of the great crowd that filled the streets. He describes Cæsar as a beautiful blond hero, "admired of all the merry wives who stood at their doors, and of all the marriageable maids who looked down from the high windows."

The diary of Burckhardt says that Cæsar was habited in a black velvet coat that came to his knee, with "a rather simple collar." In describing the entire procession, he makes no mention of Catherine, whence we gather that she did not appear in it.

In any case the mode of her entry must have differed essentially from one she remembered twenty years ago, when the population who had assembled to acclaim the bride of the most powerful man in Rome, now saw in her but the prisoner of a man yet more powerful and fear-inspiring. She was in Rome, she was once more in those halls of the Vatican

where eager courtiers had striven for a smile, a look, from the young and beautiful niece of the Pope, who now must needs follow her conqueror to the feet of another pope.

The joy of Alexander VI. in the return of his victorious son was so overwhelming that the reader of its details almost feels the thrill of his emotion. Convulsed with agitation, Alexander spoke to him in his native Spanish; he received no audience on that day *et lacrymavit et risit* in one, says Sanuto, who adds that "Madonna had been conducted to the Belvedere Palace." Catherine, guarded by twenty men-at-arms, was honourably lodged there. It stood within the precincts of the Vatican in the Pope's vineyard. The Pope's intention was to prosecute her for the expenses of the war, wherein he would be guided by what should ultimately befall the Sforza of Milan. He was considering how to force her to accept an arrangement that would leave her enough to live upon, "but she," wrote the Ferrarese Orator, "has the pluck of the devil (*sta indiavolata*) and keeps her strong mind."

The Venetian Orator records on April 21 several conversations with the Pope, who had expressed great satisfaction that the French had taken Cardinal Ascanio Sforza. His Holiness had remarked that the Triple Alliance (*la liga trina*) had given into his hands the Madonna of Forli, into those of the King of France, Ludovic, Duke of Milan, and into those of the Venetian Senate, Catherine's uncle the Cardinal. On May 11 Octavian Riario wrote from Florence to "Madonna, his beloved mother," that he and his brothers were straining every nerve "to deliver her from bondage." He ended, as usual, by praying that she "would contrive that *that hat* (cardinal's hat) fall to me."

A letter of Alessandro Braccio to Octavian and Cæsar Riario, dated May 26, 1500, alludes to the mysteries of the Vatican. Convinced that their efforts would soon be crowned with success, Braccio wrote that "he was burning with impatience to find himself with Her Excellency, Madonna, to communicate everything to her, to raise her spirits by giving her good hope of speedy deliverance; judging that your letter would be of great comfort to her. *Sed nihil est*

*tam dulce cui fortuna invida aliquid fellis non immisceat.* Having therefore hied me to the Belvedere to see Her Ladyship and read her your letter, whereas before, when I went to her, the door was freely opened to admit me; I was detained outside, in the meadow, where came Messer Aloisio (?) with an unusual countenance as of one much disturbed. He inquired what was my business, and I having told him of it, he replied that she had not yet risen, being indisposed. Therefore it would be idle for me to try to see her, but that he would convey to her for her comfort all that I had said. He advised me to confer with Messer Adriano, Secretary of His Holiness, so that he might lay the matter before the Pope. I was to send Baccino (a servant of Catherine's) to him, and having told me that he would let me know through him if I might speak with Madonna he returned indoors in a bad mind."

Braccio waited on the papal secretary and asked for an audience, but was told that this was unnecessary; everything would be said for him, the Riario should be satisfied, he (Adriano) would favour them, for the love of Pope Sixtus and Count Girolamo. He requested him to return next day for the Pope's answer.

Braccio, according to the request of Messer Aloisio, sent Baccino to him. Baccino, on hearing from Aloisio that it would be impossible to speak with Catherine, went out and met two members of the household of Messer Corverano, who were sent to seek a certain Fra Lauro (Lorenzo Borsi, Milanese Orator to Forli at the time of the death of Giovanni Popolano), to tell him to fly, for during the night their master and a certain Giovan Battista of Imola, belonging to the household of Madonna, had been taken, and Fra Lauro was also sought for, but it was too late, for in the search for Fra Lauro, in which Baccino had joined, they learned that "he too had been taken before dawn in a bed in the Governor's quarters."

Baccino then returned to the Belvedere, where the doorkeeper told him to go away at once, "for there was the devil and all in the affairs of Madonna and Corverano and

Giovan Battista had been taken." "Baccino," continues Braccio, "then returned to me, but after supper I sent him back to try and find out the reason of this disturbance. He spoke with Messer Aloisio, from whom he could not extract any details except that there had been one and that Madonna had done naught but weep and refuse to eat. On his return he caught sight of His Excellency the Duke (Cæsar Borgia) in the vineyard and learnt that there had been a parley between him and Madonna. On meeting with those men of Corverano, Baccino learned that the origin of the disturbance was a letter written by Fra Lauro to Madonna (who had shown it to Corverano), which had somehow fallen into the hands of the Duke." Braccio was ignorant of the contents of this letter, nor could he learn them; "since I may not speak with Madonna. . . . It must be some delusion of Fra Lauro's that has brought Madonna and Corverano to this pass . . . and made her feel that she is a prisoner and deserted . . . this it is she is suffering from, for which I am sore grieved." Braccio expressed curiosity, as to how Corverano could have dropped the incriminating letter and how it had come into the Duke's hands.

The Venetian Orator mentions on June 13 that a certain Fra Lauro had bribed a ducal attendant to allow the Madonna of Forli to escape, and adds that the man "was found drowned in the Tiber."

Fra Lauro, or Lorenzo Bossi, who in 1493 had already described himself as "a poor and decrepid old man" in a political letter to Catherine, was one of her oldest and most faithful friends. He had planned her escape to no purpose, owing to the loss of his letter and the Duke's subsequent discovery. Oliva narrates that when Catherine found that the plan had been divulged, believing that nothing now could save her, she "tried to subdue the guard" and take to flight.

In the days when power was hers, she could promise, terrorize, enchant and beguile. Now all that was left to her was the last resource of the wretched, the art of inspiring pity. This did not avail her with the guard, who let her have

her say but barred the way. On this attempt ensued much correspondence and intrigue. After a conversation with the Duke, Catherine wept all day, and possibly in fear of poison refused to eat.

The reason why Braccio was not received by Catherine on May 26 at the Belvedere, was either that she was no longer there or that she was to be removed in the night. The two Borgia, disturbed by this attempt to escape, deter-



CASTLE OF ST. ANGELO IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY.

mined on a more economical mode of imprisonment, and without further ado cast her into a dungeon of St. Angelo.

Catherine found herself once more within the castle she had entered and held, at the head of her armed retainers, on the death of Sixtus IV. at the beginning of her political career. There is no record of the place she inhabited within these gloomy walls, for the story of the sufferings they witnessed has ever been a mysterious one. There was an unhappy cardinal whom Pope Alexander caused to be let down into a dark hole, dug in the thickness of the walls, and who there, deprived of light, air and food and gnawed by

rats, miserably perished of stench and starvation. His was no isolated case in days when Rome was full of horror. A pilgrim of the year 1500 averred that he could never pass the Bridge of St. Angelo without nausea, because of the long string of corpses that were ever hanging to the battlements. For three centuries the bones of victims continued to moulder in the dungeons and vaults of St. Angelo, and the position of the skeletons indicated the terrible tortures to which the victims had succumbed. Until the end of the last century no one cared to make them the subject of historical research nor to investigate these results of the political power of the papacy. But with the dawn of the new era came a sense of the danger and menace that was expressed by those dry bones, and they were removed.

On June 20 the Venetian Orator wrote that "the Pope was in treaty with the Madonna of Forli to give up to the Duke Valentino the dominions of Forli and Imola, which in any case were lost to her and her sons, promising in return an income of 3000 ducats and, within a given time, another State; also to confirm her son in the Archbishopric of Pisa which his uncle, Cardinal San Giorgio, renounced in his favour."

These negotiations, which had been initiated when the Pope still hoped to extract money from the Sforza of Milan, were conducted with such bad faith and procrastination that they had degenerated into a treacherous plot. On one side the Pope aimed at draining the resources of the Riario, on the other, the Riario, already enrolled in the "Army of the Church," sought to wrest from the Pope honours and emoluments. Catherine's children no longer gave much thought to her liberty or well-being, but overwhelmed her, whose bonds could not detract from her greatness, and whom they still believed to be powerful, with demands for cardinals' hats, benefices and bishoprics, and a husband and dower for their sister Bianca. All this Catherine was to obtain from her jailer, and in return they promised to offer the Pope money to buy her freedom. In a shameful letter to their

mother, dated May 1500, Octavian and Cæsar inform her that they have made their last bid to the Pope. If this be not accepted "we pray you to expect no more from us . . .



CASTLE OF ST. ANGELO.
(*From a fresco in the Church of St. Cecilia, Bologna.*)

for we are nowise so devotedly attached to Your Ladyship that we are disposed to endure absolute beggary; Your Ladyship will therefore come to the best terms you can with

His Holiness." They added that as Pope Alexander was most just and clement, he would see justice done to her . . . "May this suffice for your comfort and stand as our final decision." "I verily believe the Devil has deprived you of sense and memory," wrote the Piovano Fortunati in righteous indignation, to Octavian. . . . "Poor creatures that you are, who cannot see that the Devil is ruining you. . . . Come to your senses in the name of God and remember that this Lady is your mother and loves you all. . . . May God forgive those who are responsible for such unparalleled perfidy. . . ."[1] A second letter from Octavian and Cæsar to their mother proves that Catherine, schooled to a new heroism by adversity, had not met her children's ingratitude with anathema, but with such gentleness and generosity as to touch the hardest-hearted of them.

"We have given one his liberty without asking aught in return: this has caused men to say that we are indeed mad," wrote Octavian and his brother. "We chose to do it that we might thereby prove to Your Ladyship that indeed we love you as our mother . . . and more, since we know that you are patient to endure every kind of adversity, writing us as you do not to impoverish ourselves by our consideration for you."[2]

Meantime another trouble had assailed her. Giannino,[3] her youngest born, now two years old, was to be torn from her maternal guardianship. "Madonna," declared certain jurisconsults, "is no longer a free agent. The Pope detains her, as a vanquished rebel and prisoner of war, in prison, thereby subjecting her to the *maxima capitis diminutio;* by this she forfeits her civic and maternal rights and all authority over her little son."

This was the result of the machinations of those to whom the child was an obstacle, and who wished he had never been born. "Into whose hands will he fall? What will become

[1] For the Piovano's whole letter, see the note to p. 256, Vol. ii.

[2] See p. 256, Vol. ii. Doc. 1195.

[3] Giannino or Giovanni de' Medici, who had been christened Ludovic. *Vide Med. a. Pr.* Filza 95. Protest of Catherine Sforza, 1500, 29 April.

of him?" thought the unhappy mother, until the Mantuan Orator wrote his master—"Since the Pope has sent the Countess—attended by only two women—to the Castle, the Florentine Signoria has sent a man to hasten the agreement between the Pope . . . who has played with her as a cat with a mouse before it eats it . . . but it is not yet signed. . . ." A fortnight later he added: "The Madonna of Forli is ill of a breaking heart; there is no longer any talk of exchange (of prisoners) or agreement and they let her have any doctor she chooses. . . ." [1]

There was no longer any need to put Catherine to death; fever and her broken heart were furthering the designs of the Borgia.

[1] 30 July, 1500, Gonzaga Archives. Mantua.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### THE POPE'S IMPEACHMENT

CATHERINE'S iron temperament withstood pain and sorrow. Contrary to the hopes and expectations of the Borgia, this prisoner, who was so difficult to guard, and who gave no further sign of immediate dissolution, became a living danger to her conquerors. Seeing that she could not be prevailed upon to renounce her States, and that she had already attempted flight, Alexander and his son determined to find a pretext that would remove her from their path, or at least consign her to the Castle of St. Angelo for the rest of her life.

The Borgia could not kill or cause this prisoner to disappear, like their other mysterious victims. The House of Sforza was fallen, but Catherine was still sister to Bianca Maria, Empress of Germany and Queen of the Romans, a subject of Louis XII., and a ward of the arms and honour of France. In the day of her misfortune, her enemies had become her defenders ; what if another French army were to invade Italy to demand an account of her ?

But the Borgian policy was, for the time being, as astute as it was treacherous ; the Pope, for reasons of his own, had kept a bone to pick with Madonna Catherina ; this was the moment to draw the threads of his net together, and to assume the part of the injured and persecuted prelate.

Since November 1499, three inhabitants of Forli had been imprisoned in the Castle of St. Angelo, who were reserved as special instruments for the final undoing of Catherine, when the opportune moment should present itself. One of these



PASSAGE FROM THE VATICAN TO THE CASTLE OF ST. ANGELO.

men, a certain Battista da Meldola, averred that in the previous November, when Valentino was on the eve of besieging Forli, the Countess had, with many precautions, sent for him, to whom she consigned certain false letters in which she or the Commune of Forli pretended to implore the Pope to compromise. The letters, steeped in a poisonous substance, were enclosed in a hollow cane which was wrapped in a red cloth so that the bearer might not be poisoned. Catherine had despatched him to Rome, enjoining him to deliver these papers into the hands of none other than the Pope.

He added that the Countess had, in confiding the execution of her infernal design to him, informed him that the letters would free her from Pope Alexander, who had been the cause of her ruin. For this purpose, she had had them placed on the chest of a victim of the mortal and contagious disease that at that time raged in Forli. On opening them the Pope would fall dead.

Battista da Meldola had, on arriving in Rome, met with a certain Christopher Balatrone, who had once served Count Girolamo and was still faithful to Octavian. After some disagreement with Catherine and Giacomo Feo, he had established himself in Rome. He wished to be reinstated in favour of the Riario, and had to this end enlisted the services of Battista.

Battista had promised to help him on condition that he would help him in a secret affair of his own. Christopher had been most willing, and Battista had then confided to him that he had been sent to Rome by the Countess to poison the Pope. For this purpose he asked him to obtain an audience for him, so that he might present the letters so infected with the plague that the Pope would die on opening them, leaving Catherine in undisputed possession of her States.

Christopher, dazed and horror-struck, had replied—"You will never succeed, for His Holiness is a God upon Earth." He had persuaded Battista to present himself with him to the Pope and reveal the plot, so that at least he might be absolved of a terrible crime. They then went to the Pope, but as it was too late to see him, a young man of Forli named

Tommaso, one of the Pope's valets, whom they found in the anteroom, had told them to return on the following day.

During the night Balatrone had informed his brother, a soldier in the Pope's guard, of the plot; the latter had repeated the story to his captain, who, after casting Battista and Christopher Balatrone into prison, had repeated the story to the Pope.

Pope Alexander, horror-struck and impatient to throw more light on the mystery, had sent his valet Tommaso to share the strict confinement of his fellow-citizens until the Countess could be brought to Rome. On November 24, there had been public thanksgiving in the Church of Santa Maria della Pace *quod Pontifex a veneno et insidiis inimicorum liberatus esset.* Then it was that the Pope had hastily despatched a courier to Romagna with a letter bidding the Duke not to put Catherine to death, but to bring her to Rome, where the matter could be sifted. A papal brief had at the same time informed the Signory of Florence of this alleged act of "Catherine, Daughter of Perdition." In this Alexander may have acted in good faith, and in the actual belief that there had been an attempt on his life. If in those days poison and assassination came to the minds of people, the fault lay with the Borgia, who were naturally the first to fear them. About this time the Ferrarese Orator wrote the Duke of Ferrara that Cardinal San Giorgio (Raphael Riario) had suddenly left Rome. The ostensible reason of his departure was notorious: he could not endure Valentino's treatment of his kinsmen. He had implored the Pope to abandon the expedition against them, but in vain. Then he had offered to be the Pope's mediator and to obtain possession of the Castle of Forli for him without bloodshed; but Catherine, in her distrust of Alexander, had refused to accede to such proposals. None could divine the end, and if anything happened to Valentino what could have saved even an innocent man from the Pope's revenge?

The other and secret cause was that "on a Wednesday night, at the seventh hour, two serving-men, habited as peasants, had been taken and imprisoned in the Castle of St.

Angelo . . . on whom were found several kinds of poison intended for the Pope." These "serving-men" were Battista of Meldola and Christofero Balatrone, natives of Forli. Cardinal Raphael thought that as a kinsman of Catherine's he might be suspected of connivance, and had therefore gone a-hunting and never returned.

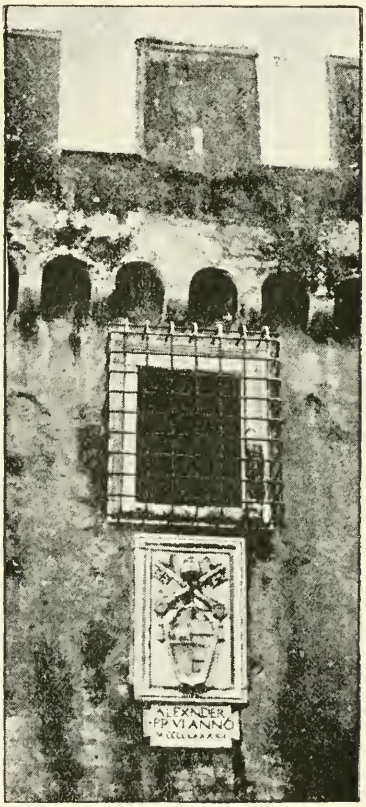
Unless the Pope had intended to keep back the charge against Catherine as a last resource, it is curious, if he was really eager to investigate the matter, that he should have allowed four months to elapse, have received Catherine with apparent courtesy, given her a palace for her residence, and what purported to be a guard of honour, although it was composed of Cæsar's myrmidons.

If Catherine had been docile it would have been better to come to an amicable understanding with her. But neither the Pope nor his son had succeeded in extorting money, nor the renunciation of her States from her; they had but driven her to exasperation and violent reprisals. She must have been planning her escape when Giovanni Lucido wrote the Marquis of Mantua, "*Sta indiavolata e forte de animo*," and things had gone from bad to worse. There was no longer room for hesitation; wherefore Cæsar, to whom Catherine was a perpetual menace, had impelled the Pope to make an end of it.

The lawsuit began, and by special desire of the Pope Catherine was subjected to a searching examination. She sturdily denied the imputation, and having listened to evidence and confessions of the prisoners, cried—"Lies. . . . Lies. . . . There is not a word of truth in them!" In any other case, the prisoner would have been subjected to torture, but even Pope Alexander did not venture to subject the body of Catherine Sforza to such an experiment. He therefore ordered all the accused to be brought before him and again cross-examined in his presence.

"It is untrue! . . . I did not do it. . . . I did not send them," cried the exasperated Catherine, from whose lips came such prodigious countercharges that the two Borgia

repented of having roused this woman. It seemed to them as if they had raised the devil; in failing to bring to light the guilt of Catherine they had but exposed the infamy of Cæsar. Silence became the order of the day, and secrecy enshrouded the subsequent proceedings. The substance of the interrogatories and cross-examination was not allowed to transpire, although Bernardi appears to have known it without daring to write it. It was only fifty years later that Oliva ventured to be more explicit.



WINDOW IN THE CASTLE OF ST. ANGELO.

As a conviction was out of the question, and a proclamation of the prisoner's innocence would have been both scandalous and dangerous, no sentence could be delivered. This was doubtless a great disappointment to the Pope, to whose feet the very nature of the crime would have brought the civilized world.

The total absence of any document bearing on this celebrated lawsuit,[1] and the fact of the personal intervention of the Pope, leads the writer to believe that being a private affair of the Pontiff's, determined by special political motives, it was personally and verbally conducted by Alexander VI., and that he stopped it, without coming to any decision, when he found that it could not conduce to the attainment of his ends.

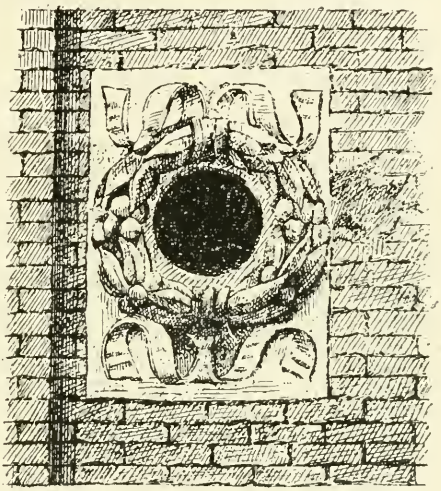
[1] *Vide* Letter of the Chief Custodian of the Vatican Archives, *Caterina Sforza*, *Pier Desiderio Pasolini*, p. 290, Vol. ii.

Was Catherine innocent? Had she saved herself by a combination of daring and astuteness, or had she prevailed by the force of truth? We know that under much slighter provocation she had not hesitated to steep her hands in blood. If, in self-defence and in defence of her State and her children's lives, she had had recourse to this extreme measure, who, in her own time, would have thrown the first stone at her? Neither may it be thought that the sacredness of the Pontiff's character would withhold any of his contemporaries from attempting to take his life; that would be modelling the ruthless soul of the sixteenth century to our own image. To Catherine, daughter of a daggered father, widow of two husbands slain in treachery, violent deaths were no novelty. And it is possible that, both as the idol and the victim of the papal court, she may have looked behind the scenes and upon the popes of her day as persons not wholly sacred.

Princes had so often recourse to political homicide as a means of government, that when one died his death was seldom ascribed to natural causes. It was known that when the Borgia found it necessary to avoid suspicion they used a powder, white as snow and of agreeable flavour, that, blending with any kind of food, produced certain but gradual death. Catherine had made so many experiments in *veleni a termine*[1] and other poisons—as is proved by her book of "household recipes"—that it is difficult to believe this story of poison for the Pope. The strongest proofs of her innocence lie in the ineptitude of the means attributed to her, and to the Pope's prolonged silence and inaction rather than in her incapacity for committing the crime. Catherine was not a woman to use the first comer as an emissary, nor would she have employed a "serving-man," a simple soldier, or a person as ignorant as was evidently Battista of Meldola. Yet the

[1] Her household book contains recipes for cosmetics, disinfectants, poisons, and prescriptions for every disease under the sun, among which, amid many that raise the modern smile, may be found some, notably anæsthetics, that forestall modern discoveries. *Vide Experimenti de la Exma. Sra. Caterina da Furli, copiati dagli autografi di lei dal Conte Lucantonio Cuppano, Ravenna, Arch. Pasolini, Cod. cartacco, Sec.* xvi.

criminals, when taken by surprise, averred that they had been sent by Catherine. Terror-stricken at the prospect of torture, with a horrible death staring them in the face, they seized the most plausible pretext for diverting the wrath of the Borgia from themselves to their sovereign Lady. Machiavelli accepted the popular version without discussion. "Madonna," he tersely wrote to the Ten (di Balia), "sent to poison Pope Alexander." Burckhardt's diary[1] records that the idea did not originate with the Countess, but with a subject of hers, who, being taken red-handed, averred that his only thought was that the death of the Pope would deliver the Lady of Forli, for whose sake he would give his life a thousand times, from the advancing army of Valentino. Pomponio Leti, in his life of Cæsar Borgia, confirms this account.



CANNON'S MOUTH, CASTLE OF ST. ANGELO.

At Venice, that great mart of political gossip, people jested on the "vanie" or simulated fears of "Papa Borgia" of the poison of the Lady of Forli, which it was supposed were intended to alienate from her the sympathy of the Florentine Republic. Neither do Gregorovius[2] nor Moroni[3] give any credence to this fable.

[1] Novembris 18.—*Die Jovis.*

[2] *Civilization of the Renascence*, Vol. iii. p. 243.

[3] *Dizionario Ecclesiastico*, Vol. xxv. p. 272.

## CHAPTER XXXV

### THE DELIVERANCE

For another year the walls of St. Angelo hide Catherine from our view. Little is known of that time save that Fra Lauro shared her captivity, and possibly her plans for the future. She still looked forward to escape, and to regaining possession of her little Giannino; while the Borgia, who hoped she would die in confinement, had determined on suppressing her as soon as they found that they could do so with impunity.

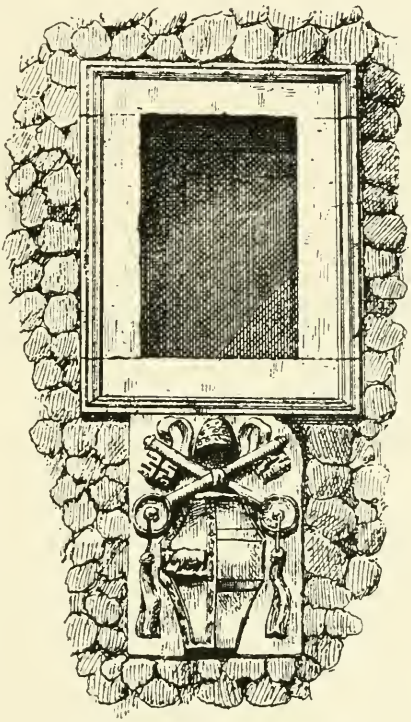
Her end would probably have been like that of Astorre Manfredi,[1] whose body was found in the Tiber, after he had been put to death in the Castle of St. Angelo, but in June 1501, the same French army that had reft her of her State once more invaded Italy, led by Yves d'Alègre, to take possession of the kingdom of Naples, which was claimed by Louis XII. as heir of Charles VIII. The King of France had renewed his alliance with the Pope.

The sieges of Imola and Forli had been the only incidents in the war of the preceding year on which the French prided themselves. Catherine lived in their hearts, and in her glorification they glorified themselves. Her resistance had shed a new lustre on the French arms, without which, they averred, neither Duke, nor Pope, nor Germans, nor Spaniards

[1] Astorre Manfredi had been taken by Cæsar Borgia while heroically defending his city in his expedition in Romagna. The young Lord of Faenza, once affianced to Bianca Riario, was murdered in the Castle of St. Angelo, and his body thrown into the Tiber.

could have subdued the Comtesse Katherine Sforce, the formidable Madame de Forli. And none might harm a hair of her head so long as France was France.

This homage of the French to Catherine's valour may be best gauged by an appreciation of the enthusiasm it evoked throughout the length and width of the peninsula. Machiavelli says that many songs and epigrams in praise of her were current in his day. The only one which the writer has succeeded in tracing is the "Lament of Catherine Sforza," by Marsilio Compagnoni,[1] beginning—



WINDOW, CASTLE OF ST. ANGELO.

"Ascolta questa sconsolata
Catherina da forlivo,"

throughout whose many stanzas occur words and expressions so characteristic of the style peculiar to Catherine's familiar correspondence that the poem not only expresses Catherine's sentiments, but might be made up in parts of phrases that have actually fallen from her lips—

"Anti morta o ch'abia andare
Via piangendo a capo inchino
Son disposta a ruinare
I fondamenti de Forlivo.

* * * * *

Prima voglio veder el diavolo
A cavallo de la luna.

* * * * *

[1] Milan. Trivulziana, *seq.* 48, 4.

Io vo' perder per bataglia
E morire con honore
Ma'l me dole ben d' Italia."
* * * * *

The "Lament" is above all things an appeal to Ludovico il Moro to raise an army, re-conquer his State, and mend the fortunes of the House of Sforza. Catherine exhorts the Italians, intimidated by French successes, to follow her advice and example. Milan is lost! What of that? Let them read the historians! The French (Ultramontanes) had once even invaded Rome, but were hounded from it and undone.

"Ah! Italiani impauriti
se udite la mia istoria
v'armerete inanimiti
per quistar honor e gloria
tito Livio fa memoria
ne' gran facti de' Romani
guastar Roma i tramontani
poi sua gente fracassata.
Scolta questa sconsolata
catarina da forlivo."

These and other songs, giving popular expression to the genius of Catherine, had been sung throughout Romagna and in both camps; for in the French ranks were many Italian mercenaries. They were household words in castle and city, and familiar ones by the enemy's camp-fire.

In those days news travelled so slowly from one country to another that often they who left a country knew no more about it until they returned to it again. Nothing more had transpired outside Italy of Catherine's fortunes, and the French believed her to be living in honourable ease and liberty. It was only after they had crossed the Alps, on their arrival in Lombardy, that they learnt that the Pope was keeping her in durance, that he had persecuted her with a vexatious lawsuit, that she languished on a bed of sickness, and that she would never leave the Castle of St. Angelo alive.

The French cursed and menaced the thankless Borgia, vile and traitorous defamers of the honour of France. This

news of treachery to Catherine and France was indeed the first spark of that flame which kindled steadily to a fire. From this time on, the relations between the Pope and the French became so strained that they who had come in friendship in 1501, returned in anger in 1502 to put a limit to the ambition of Cæsar, who had aggrandized himself at their expense; while the Pope at the same time, in order to expel the French from Italy, had entered into a league with the Emperor of Germany, the Venetians and the Spaniards. Valentino, moreover, who called himself "Cæsar Borgia of France," had so harried and tyrannized Italy that the Italians would have dared and endured anything to turn him out of it: every aspiration and all political enmity paled before the hate of Cæsar. Such cries of suffering had reached the ears of good King Louis that one day he exclaimed that "a war undertaken to punish the crimes of the Borgia would be so holy and righteous that its merits could not be surpassed by a crusade against the Turks." On the approach of the King, Cæsar threw all the blame of his political rapine on his lieutenants. He had escaped punishment, yet this man, to whose ambitions no crime, however monstrous, was an obstacle, was invested with the highest dignities of the Court of France; King Louis paid him a large pension, and addressed him as *Mon très aimé cousin!* He had married his sister Lucretia, who was widowed of two husbands, to Alfonso of Ferrara, and was the sworn ally and faithful executor of the plots of Alexander VI., worthy father of a despicable son. All this and more weighed on the conscience of Louis XII., who besides was ill-pleased that the Pope should incline his ear to the Emperor Maximilian, whose ambition it was to be crowned in St. Peter's. On arriving in Italy, he was deafened by the cries of the aggrieved—cries for justice and for vengeance. The coalition against Cæsar Borgia included the Dukes of Urbino and Ferrara, the Marquis of Mantua, Cardinal Orsini, and the Orators of Florence, Bologna and Venice. It would seem as if he could no longer hesitate to make an end of the despoiler of Italy and the dishonour of France. Cæsar was saved by the

appearance upon the scene of a defender of humble aspect but of some capacity. A certain Francis Troches, or Troccio, his valet or chamberlain, known by the unhappy Italians as the most daring and infamous of the Pope's confidants, presented himself before the King of France, and succeeded in clearing the character of his master, despite the accusation of the princes and people of Italy. So ably did he lie that the Borgia were purified in the eyes of the King, whose confidence in them was restored. This is not the only occasion on which Troccio rendered them this service; this special incident, which occurred a year later (1502), is referred to here because Troccio will soon again appear, and the reader will be the better prepared to recognize in him a suitable agent between the papal and the French courts.

The knightly regard of the French army, "in the full pride of its chivalry," for Catherine, was especially stimulating in the case of Yves d'Alègre, who shared the chief command with d'Aubigny. He had done all he could to protect Catherine from the avarice of Antoine de Bissey, and from the licentious ferocity of Cæsar Borgia. He had pledged the word of a French officer that none might call her prisoner, but that the liberty of a subject of his King should be respected, and he swore that he would rescue her from the vile clutches of the Borgia as from the devil's claws. He left the army encamped at Viterbo, and, attended by only three horsemen, rode with such haste to Rome that he dismounted at the gates of the Vatican on the 20th. He instantly presented himself to the Pope, to whom with the audacity of a Frenchman, and the assurance of a powerful ally, he spoke as follows—

"Holy Father! Madame Katherine Sforce is not, and never can be your prisoner: she is the subject of the King of France my Lord, whose military laws, as you are aware, prohibit the imprisonment of women in war. She might have been temporarily detained in Rome but left free to go and come within the city as she pleased. This was the compact agreed upon by my mediation between your Duke of Valentino and the Bailli of Dijon, who had charge of

Madame, and for it I gave my security. Therefore Your Holiness will immediately liberate Madame, or I will advise the King my Lord by courier, that compacts to which he had lent his name have been violated: and with sorrow to Himself and dishonour to Your Holiness he will enforce the deliverance of Madame, unless our army which now lies at Viterbo, but will be here within a few days, has not already wiped out the dishonour of France with tumult and scandal. . . ."

The Pope was intimidated, and lest he should lose the alliance with France and Spain, and the fruits of the war with Naples, he obeyed and declared that Catherine should be set free. But the closing scene of this drama, simple and speedy as it appeared, could not take place without the intervention of the orators of alien States and others, among whom were perhaps the Florentine Allessandro Bracci and the orator of the republic, Francesco de' Pepi. One who may not be overlooked on this occasion was certainly Troches or Troccio, one of the Borgia's most trusted assassins, destined to be the buffer between themselves and the righteous indignation of the King of France.

Meanwhile Cæsar Borgia, in virtue of his recent conquests of Pesaro, Rimini and Faenza, had been created Duke of Romagna. On the approach of the French army, he foresaw that a movement in favour of Catherine would re-open a dangerous matter, and since his return, on the evening of the 17th, he had lain *perdu* in the Vatican to watch the tide of events and regulate its course.

It is to be gathered from several documents that the Duke of Romagna opposed the liberation of Catherine with all his might. "She would be a living menace to his new State. She would draw the Emperor to her side, move the Florentines, cause a rising among the Bolognese, fill the Venetians with suspicion, agitate the people of Genoa and Savona, and turn Lombardy and Romagna upside down! She had partisans, conspirators, intrigues and lovers all over Italy: she would raise the devil, as she had ever done, to regain her States and revenge herself." Thus the Duke justified her imprisonment and opposed her deliverance,

without, however, making any impression on d'Alègre ; the French army was at the gates of Rome, there was no time to be lost, and the Duke had no choice but to yield. There was therefore nothing more to do but to discuss the terms upon which she should be set free. These were that she should sign a formal renunciation of her States, and consent to supervision so long as she remained in Rome. The Frenchman then left the Vatican and rode down to the fort by the Borgo. In a few moments Catherine, languishing in prison, would look upon the angel of deliverance.

The woman who rose to meet Monseigneur d'Alègre did not resemble the one he had known a year ago. She had passed a year in the dark, narrow cell into which the Borgia had thrust her. They had expended as little as possible on her, in continual expectation of her death. She was haggard from suffering and scant food, worn by fever, and livid from living in the dark.

O Lords of the Venetian Senate! come and gaze on your formidable enemy, *quella tigre de la madona de Forli!* Do you recognize her in the long, spare, nun-like figure, worn by vigil, fast and penance, who has tried to still the torments of the mind by those of the body? Every time that her scanty food was brought her she had dreaded poison ; every night she had dreaded the Tiber.

Yet her hard destiny had not surprised her: she believed and felt that she had deserved it. Her letters prove that in religion her ideas were simple and firmly rooted, and that the influence of her grandmother Bianca, and her adopted mother Bona, had never left her. She had no doubts on the subject of free-will ; she was sure that in this world or the next she would have to give an account of her public and private shortcomings. In the triumph of the Borgia, she perceived the punishment of the crimes of the Riario, and was assured that God would not forget the Borgia when their time came. In her own tortures she felt that her victims were being avenged: those who had been thrown down spiked wells or had died on her gallows. O poor Rosaria

and innocent children of the Orsi! O unhappy wretches who had disappeared in the dungeons of Imola and Forli! your blood has cried aloud to God for vengeance, and God had punished her who slew and tortured.

She appears to have sought relief in correspondence with her sons; not by complaining of physical discomfort, which she had assured them she was able and willing to bear, but from the torments of her conscience; and her sons, having recovered their sense of justice and filial love, had offered the Pope in exchange for her liberty the whole of their ecclesiastical benefices in Romagna. The penitent they would have rescued from "such hard servitude and misery" suffered even more acutely from the terrors of that Gehenna to which her conscience pointed than from those of the Tiber and the poison of her jailers. She prayed them to remember her in their prayers. They in return prayed her to bear these torments, since God had willed them: ". . . hoping in the unwearied love, mercy and justice of Our Redeemer Jesus Christ; in the certainty that he will not abandon Your Ladyship . . . and that these afflictions are given for the salvation of Your soul. . . . So that by unceasing appeal to Him, he may grant Your desire, always remembering not to be led by the Devil to despair, even if he should put before Your eyes all Your errors. For one sole drop of the blood of Christ suffices to ransom all the sins of hell, much less to justify Your Excellency. Therefore fear nothing, Madonna, Our beloved Mother; be steadfast and let God work, for We know that he will neither abandon You nor Us, and that even if we succeed not with this contract (proposal for her deliverance) it will be to Your honour and salvation. Therefore take comfort and lean on God, for all other hope is vain. . . . Neither will We cease to work in the alleviation of Your anguish. . . . It will be well for Your Ladyship to tear up this letter at once, so that it may not fall into the hands of the Pope. . . ."[1] Besides her terrors and remorse,

[1] A long letter addressed at this same time to Cardinal Medici by Octavian and Cæsar Riario, proves that even in the effort to effect their mother's deliverance they were seeking their own advantage and clamouring for benefits

Catherine suffered agonies of anxiety on behalf of her little son Giannino. For the love of this child she longed to perform good deeds, so earning a right to live, to see her child again, to rescue him. These had been the thoughts of Catherine during those long days and nights she had lain in the Castle of St. Angelo, clasping her crucifix to her breast. She did not dream that the army which had dethroned her had again invaded Italy, and was clamouring at the gates of Rome for her freedom.

It had seemed almost impossible to the Borgia that even d'Alègre could induce Catherine to renounce her sovereignty. But Catherine was above all a practical statesman, and she realized that her States were indeed lost to her. France had guaranteed her personal liberty, yet King Louis neither could nor would give a ducat nor a soldier to re-instate her. She remembered that the "Most Christian king" had declared his personal indifference to the question of Romagna, into which he had been drawn by the Pope's importunity, and that he also felt himself prohibited from intervention between the Pope and his vicars.

Catherine, who did not wish to increase the difficulties of her deliverers, immediately conceded to d'Alègre that which she had so obstinately denied to the Borgia. In truth this renunciation of her States, which she had agreed to sign as soon as she left prison, did not mean much to her. The Pope was stricken in years; after him what would become of the Duke of Romagna? Would divine justice chastise the Riario, yet overlook the treachery, the poison and other villainies of Cæsar Borgia? The College of Cardinals included a Sforza, a Riario, and a Della Rovere . . . the days of Sixtus IV. might yet return for her and hers. Catherine witnessed a singular spectacle during the last days of her imprisonment. The Pope, albeit a Spaniard, and, to quote Jean d'Autun, "a bad Frenchman," had received the French captains with conspicuous honour, and Rome was in holiday attire. "The league between the Pope, France and Spain had been

for themselves. See Vol. ii. of the original *Caterina Sforza*, di Pier Desiderio Pasolini.

declared," writes Sanuto. "An edict requires every one to rejoice and illuminate . . . there is nothing to be seen in Rome but silks and brocade." The French army left the Eternal City on June 28, 1501. The infantry, artillery and baggage-wagons, which were the first to move, extended for the length of a mile. Then came the mounted men-at-arms, helmet on head and lance on hip, in fighting array. The city was so deafened by the sound of trumpets, fifes and big Swiss drums, that thunder would have passed unheard."

Opposite to the Castle of St. Angelo, seated on a low battlemented terrace and surrounded by cardinals, bishops and Roman barons, sat Pope Alexander, with the Duke of Romagna by his side, extending his hand in apostolic benediction over the heads of the Italian, French and Swiss soldiers, as they passed before him.

On June 13, a few armed men, on horseback, issued from the Castle of St. Angelo. A woman rode in their midst, and with them crossed the bridge. It was Catherine, who, after sixteen months' *duresse*, was led by Troccio, chamberlain of the Pope, from the Castle of St. Angelo to the house of the [Spanish] Cardinal of San Clemente, and there, wrote the Piovano Fortunati to Octavian and Cæsar Riario, "she remained about three hours: and by the deed of the public notary did renounce her States on her own behalf and as guardian of her sons . . . and, besides, did agree, under penalty of twenty-five ducats, not to depart from Rome without permission from the Pope." This permission would be accorded her as soon as she received 2000 ducats, which the Countess acknowledged "to have spent on the occasion of this her deliverance among various persons." The fact that Catherine was led out of prison by Troccio[1] points to the

[1] The end of Troches, or Troccio, is too characteristic of the age to be omitted here. The assassin claimed the Red Hat as a reward for his services, and one day (in the year 1553) confided to the Pope his displeasure in not having been included in the last batch of cardinals. "And His Holiness replying that 'My Lord Duke had made the list,' Troccio inveighed against the Duke until the Pope called him a madman to let his tongue run away with him; for if the Duke heard of it, 'he would surely put him to death. . .'" Troccio fled from Rome, and either to save his life, or

probability that he was a party to the negotiations with d'Alègre, that he had dictated to Catherine the sum "incurred in her expenses of liberation," and that he had been employed as a jailer-inspector by the Borgia, to report to them on the progress of the malady that should have delivered them of her. The Piovano encloses some letters written to him by the Countess, and the list of the persons among whom the 2000 ducats were to be distributed, sending the whole by a trusty groom, so that "the Countess may escape from those incarnate fiends and return to her children. . ." "And I think it best to hasten matters so that she may avoid any new snare, for the slightest hitch would reduce her to a worse servitude than before. . . Therefore provide at once and hasten to be here. . . ." In the same letter we learn that Fra Lauro was at large and that Madonna had already appointed him her chaplain, "an excellent choice, inasmuch as he is an influential person and a worthy friar;" although the Piovano seems to fear that his (Fra Lauro's) want of tact may be prejudicial to them in Florence.

Having signed the document of renunciation, Catherine's first steps were directed to Monseigneur d'Alègre, with the object of offering her thanks to her noble deliverer, "with whom she remained for a long time in conversation on present affairs and past events." [1]

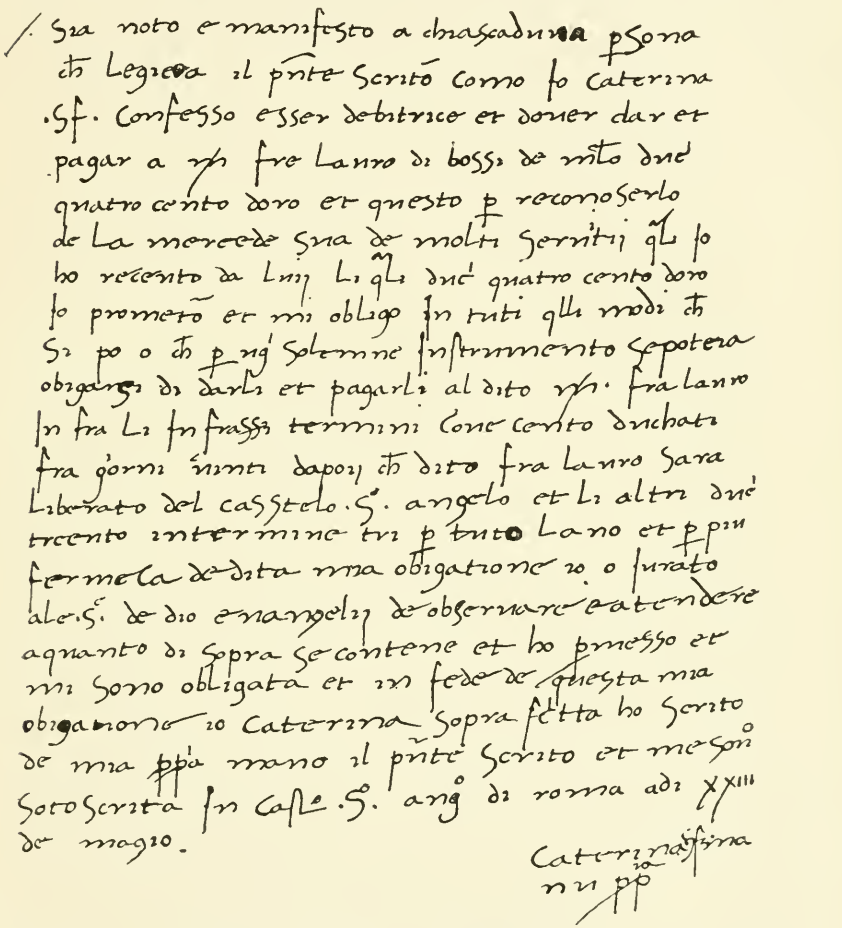
Catherine "went to dwell in her own house," wrote the Piovano, "or rather in that of the Most Reverend Monsignor

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in revenge, revealed to the French the secret intrigues of the Borgia with Spain. Valentino enjoined on his allies to catch Troccio, who was spreading rumours "injurious to the honour of France." He was accordingly seized on board a vessel bound for Corsica, brought back to Rome, and imprisoned in a tower in Trastevere. Here he was confronted by the Duke, who after saying a few words to him retired to a place where, unseen, he could watch Troccio being strangled by Michelotto. "They have sent him to do penance for his sins in another world," wrote Giustinian to the Venetian Senate on June 8 of that year. "Now," continues the Orator, "they are almost without servants to do their business. The Duke has only Remolines and Michelotto left, who are expecting to come to the same end, within a short time."—*Vide* Letter of Bertrande Costabeli to the Duke of Ferrara, June 11, 1503. P. Villari (*Machiavelli:* Vol. i. p. 599), and the *Dispatches of Giustinian*, No. 410, t. ii. pages 35–36.

[1] Burriel.

San Giorgio" (Cardinal Raphael Riario).[1] Surrounded by the partisans of Pope Sixtus, Catherine remained in Rome until the middle of July, and every day a long line of the



AUTOGRAPH LETTER OF CATHERINE SFORZA.

richly-caparisoned mules and palfreys of the Roman cardinals and nobles stopped the way before her door. For especially those of the Orsini faction came to offer their homage and congratulations to this celebrated woman, and

[1] Nephew of Girolamo and one of the defenders of the Castle of Forli.

either from admiration or curiosity, all Rome followed in her steps, until even the Florentine Orator began to think he might venture to present himself. "I, having cautiously offered my excuses to the Madonna of Imola in that I have not paid my respects to her," wrote Francesco de Pepi to the Florentine Ten, "she informed me that she is about to leave, and that not knowing where else to go, will come to Florence, desiring me to recommend her to Your Lordships. Roma, *die X iulii*, 1501."

Three days later, the Pope, in the following letter, recommended to the Signory of Florence the erstwhile "Daughter of Perdition and Iniquity."

"Beloved Sons, Greeting and Apostolic Benediction.

"Our beloved Daughter in Christ, the noble Dame Catherine Sforza, whom, as you know, we have on certain reasonable grounds caused to be here detained, is leaving for Florence, we having graciously liberated her. And because according to our habit and pastoral office—we have not only dealt clemently with the said Catherine, but we desire, in so far as it is consistent with the law of God, to provide for her advantage—we are minded to write you, fervently recommending to you the said Catherine by the love you bear us: so that, confiding in your benevolence, she may find shelter among you as in her own land, and that by virtue of our recommendation, she may not be deceived in this her hope. . . . Given in Rome . . . under the Apostolic Seal on the 13th day of July, 1501, in the ninth year of our Pontificate."

As early as July 1, Paul Riario[1] had written Catherine that all Rome exulted in her deliverance, and all Florence rejoiced in her coming, adding that he hoped that she would be accompanied to Florence by some of the French lords, lest "she fall into danger."

To this same danger the Mantuan Orator alludes in writing to Francesco Gonzaga—"The Countess of Forli has left this

[1] Nephew of Girolamo and one of the defenders of the Castle of Forli.

with the Pope's permission, and for fear of her enemies . . . gave out that she was leaving by land, but went by sea. . . *Roma*, 20 *iulii*, 1501." And Machiavelli says—"The Madonna of Imola was liberated by the Pope at the prayer of Monseigneur d'Alègre. And no sooner was she free than she fled to Leghorn by sea and came to Florence."

Catherine must have heard that Cæsar Borgia, having been forced to liberate her against his will, had posted certain Romagnole assassins along the way she was to travel. She preferred to risk the dangers of the sea, and fall into the hands of Turks and corsairs, than those of the Borgia braves; she did not leave, but fled from Rome by the Tiber, in a boat; taking to the sea at Ostia or Fiumicino and landing, after a few days' sail, at Leghorn. She must have entered Florence by the Pisan road that wound through the fragrant woods, passing by its fir and cypress crowned castles and its populous villages, until she looked again upon the hospitable walls that girded the city of her choice.

On approaching Florence, Catherine was met by a little cavalcade which, with indescribable emotion, she discovered to consist of her five sons, Octavian, Cæsar, Galeazzo and Francesco Riario, and Bernardino Feo, who led her through the quiet streets of her childish dreams; through Por Santa Maria, turning from Vaccherecia into the great square where stood the palace of the Signoria and the house of the Gondi to the palace of the Podestà; then on again by the Via del Proconsolo, through the Borgo degli Albizzi, under the windows of the Pazzi, the Alessandri and the Filicaia, until at last, passing under the Arch of San Piero, and entering Borgo Pinti, they halted before the house of Giuliano Scali.

Here Catherine's daughter Bianca must have placed the little Giannino, who had been confided to her special care, in his mother's arms. Here, too, she was awaited by Lorenzo, brother of her third husband, who conducted her to her own house, "as mistress of all that had belonged to his late brother," says Burriel. Catherine at once took her place in a family destined to found the reigning dynasty of Tuscany, to give a queen to France and a splendid civilization to the world.

Florentines of every faction and condition came to pay their respects to the widow of Giovanni Popolano, and the old and the new stories of the Madonna of Imola revived in the minds of the Florentines. Had not Machiavelli told them of her? And they came in eager crowds to do her honour.

The warmth of Catherine's reception caused displeasure at the Vatican, and some anxiety to Valentino. "It is my duty to inform Your Lordships," wrote Fortunati to Octavian and Cæsar Riario, "that the Duke has complained to the Bishop of Volterra, that this city holds you in such favour, reputation and esteem, and His Reverence having constrained him to explain whether he referred to Madonna, your mother, he replied that he set no store by women, especially by your mother, whom, for his part, he would not have suffered to leave the Castle of St. Angelo."

Yet this woman, who had been so bitter in denunciation of her other enemies, the Bentivoglio and the cardinals, her kinsmen, this woman who has been described as "quick of speech,"[1] when her anger was roused; who had been betrayed, slandered, and starved by the Borgia, never henceforward mentioned them in hatred or revenge. That which she had suffered at their hands she could not speak of. Only once she had spoken to her Dominican confessor these significant words—"Could I write all, the world would turn to stone!"

[1] Bernardi, "*di lingua velocissima.*"

# CHAPTER XXXVI

## THE LAST TROUBLES AND THE END

CATHERINE'S biographers have been hitherto unanimous in stating that after her arrival in Florence, forgetful of worldly grandeur and political intrigue, she lived, absorbed in pious thoughts and charitable works, in absolute retirement.

Yet the correspondence of that day, some of Catherine's letters and many addressed to her by her sons and familiars, show that the pious resignation of those years was not wholly unleavened by worldly cares and sorrows, and even by ambition.

Her friends gave her a mournful account of the effects of Cæsar's government in her former dominions: "Fire" and "Rope" were the words of most frequent occurrence in letters from Imola; but in that fort where tortures were enacted, they worked day and night and expended 6000 to 8000 gold ducats in the preparation for public amusement. Cæsar would keep his city in *liesse*. Attached to his person was a boisterous company of a hundred young men, many of whom were to become famous in arms; among them being Dionisio of Brisighella, Taddeo della Volpe (who later fought under the Venetian flag), and the Spaniards Don Juan de Cardona and Moncada (who later served Charles V.). Among veterans in arms were Hercules Bentivoglio, ex-captain of the Florentines, Cæsar Spadari of Modena, Vitellozzo Vitelli and the Orsini. In carnival time this wild band was a worse scourge to the quiet population of Imola than they had been in time of war. Thus Catherine's trusty Tonelli, who con-

cludes by entreating her to send a courier to her sister, the Empress of Germany, to hasten her coming with the Emperor; it being "now the highest time." On February 21, 1502, Tonelli sends Catherine a list of her partisans at Imola, and one "of the ribald traitors who have given Your Excellency's State into the hands of that *Marano* (Valentino)." He adds that every night the faithful meet at his house to recall their Lady, whom "may God and Our Lady send back soon to her State. . . . One day seems to us as a thousand years. . . ." With wide-stretched arms they all await their sovereign Lady, who if she come not soon to "drive those swinish traitors to the House of the Devil, it were better for us to die. . . . If I sleep, I think I am with Your Ladyship, if I wake it is the same; if I eat I leave off eating to talk with Your Ladyship." Throughout Bologna and Ferrara, there is no talk but of her return, so that the "poltroon traitors" are beginning to feel ill at ease. He concludes by allusion to the rapine of Valentino, and of his creature "Messer Remiro," and to the passage of Lucretia Borgia through Imola.

There is a letter from Catherine (dated April 22, 1502, to a certain Fra Domenico) enjoining on him to open the eyes of the Emperor Maximilian to the "perfidy and malevolence of those, thanks to whom little credence has been given to me hitherto, to the detriment and dishonour of His Cesarean Majesty. . . . The affairs of Italy, and especially of these provinces, cannot be regulated by this standard. . . . The populace has opened its eyes, caring naught for blows, threats and terrorism. The Emperor must do exactly the contrary to that which was done by the French Kings Charles and Louis, and, by conferring favour and prosperity on this people, will obtain from them more than he could have asked. . . . And so it would be with the rest of Italy. . . . I have warned His Cesarean Majesty that unless he be prompt in action and loving treatment of the Italians, he will lose every chance of achieving his ends. . . ."

On August 18, 1503, Pope Alexander VI. died, and that the Church did not expire in his arms is surely a sign that God had taken her under His wing. With the extinction of the

fount of corruption, the world breathed a purer air and Catherine awakened. "I am ready to mount my horse," she wrote to Antenore Giovanetti at Bologna, a month later, "and am only waiting to put everything in order. . . . Write me where it were best to dismount (Imola or Forli?) and take counsel with Messer Bonaparte. Be assured, all of you, that these States must return to the Lord Octavian and to me, his mother. . . . I have arranged that everything must take its (natural) course." But Catherine was entreated not to move at that juncture; her enemies were legion. "I realize," wrote Giovan Battista Ridolfi, Florentine Commissioner in Romagna, "that if Madonna were dead the Lord Octavian would not be unacceptable, except among the people of Forli and its rural population. But during the lifetime of Madonna they who might espouse his cause would do so unwillingly; so much do they fear and hate her." This either represents the opinion or the policy of Catherine's adversaries. Meanwhile, from Imola they write her that "she is indeed not hated," and reproach her for scruples and want of faith in herself. On September 9 Tonelli had written her from Rome: "All the princes have come to their own again, because they have not had as many scruples as Your Ladyship." If she would send troops under Octavian, she would learn that the men of Imola are not so disaffected as has been represented to her. If Guido Vaini[1] were but back among them! "He has up to now endured such injuries at the Duke's hands that there is no ill on earth he would not do to him . . . and even without this, he would have done it."

The Florentines, impatient to snatch Forli from Valentino, tried to corrupt his castellane, promising the latter the hand of the still beautiful and influential Catherine, and the life-governorship of Imola. Giovanni Dalamasa wrote her that many citizens had discussed the matter with the said castellane, telling him that "the best thing he could do was to give the said fort to Your Ladyship and take you to wife." The castellane replied that he would certainly not give the fort to the Pope, whom "he hated for a traitor," and that he would

[1] Head of the Ghibellines of Imola and a partisan of the Riario.

rather give it to Catherine than to any other. And many times he had said to his friends that Catherine was his wife (*i. e.* the wife for him). Catherine had already been in communication with him by means of a certain Ceriobola, a strange woman with whom she was on most intimate terms, and on whom she relied in matters that required secrecy.

The plan for the return to Forli was soon perfected and drawn up. Catherine and Octavian sent Antenore Giovanetti to Venice with a message to the effect that if the Senate would co-operate in their reinstatement they would do anything that Venice could require of them. Octavian, despite his archbishopric, was willing to wed the daughter of a Venetian patrician; he no longer hankered after the Red Hat. The Countess had received offers from the Florentines, but albeit a citizen of Florence she wished to ally herself with the Venetians. Meanwhile Anton Maria Ordelaffi had been cutting the ground beneath their feet. With the help of the Duke of Ferrara and the Bolognese, he had already entered Forli. The Venetian magistrates asked Giovanetti if he came on behalf of Cardinal Riario as well as on that of the Count and Countess, and he having replied in the negative, they gave him an evasive answer.

But Catherine was not to be discouraged. "It is matter for general wonder that you should allow yourself to be led (by the nose)," she wrote Octavian; ". . . . beware to be subject to none, nor to be coerced by the letters you receive . . . that which is being done is for your sake and for none other . . . if you are guided by the wrong persons you will find *your cap pulled over your eyes* . . . wherefore awake!" She had information from Rome of the policy of the moment; she begged him to remember that in her previous letter she "advised him" that he had come to man's estate, that he was of an age to know the world and men; to him and none other she appealed that he might remember she "was his mother, to whom he had given his word." In the affair of Ordelaffi, "it pleases me that the iron be struck while it is hot . . . lose no time, but remember that (popular) favour is an important factor; therefore hasten, I beseech you. . . ."

"*Si jus violandum est, regnandi causa violandum est*," wrote Fortunati to Octavian, "and I pray Your Lordship to remember that you have ever known me for a faithful servant who (now exhorts you) to continually hold your mother in your heart; for, before God, she is about to do things of fire for Your Lordship. And since all cannot be said . . . read often the notes given you by your mother for the time when your State should be given back to you."

Octavian never recovered his State; that he was incapable of regaining it was the opinion of the Ancients of Imola, who, on October 22, 1503, scarcely deigned to open a letter he had written them, and, having opened it, threatened to hang the horseman "by the neck" who had brought it. "If Your Ladyship had headed the undertaking," wrote Tonelli, "it would have yielded better fruit. . . . We are indeed worse off than when Valentino was here, for then, at least, we had undisturbed possession of our own. If Your Ladyship do not help us we are in evil case. . . ." Throughout Bologna, where Tonelli then resided, Catherine's sons were spoken so badly of that he and her other partisans "were sore ashamed, from love to Your Ladyship, whose sons they are; every day we go to pay our court to Madonna Zianevera (Ginevra Bentivoglio), and if it were not for the entertainment offered us by Her Ladyship, we were already dead of sheer weariness."

On December 2, 1503, Alessandro Sarti wrote Catherine from Rome that "they who would not have your name mentioned, when I first arrived in Rome, are now well disposed in your favour, and whereas at first I met with ugly faces (opposition) for love of Your Ladyship, I now encounter smiling ones, and whereas at first I was told in this house of the chamberlain that I might not speak of Your Ladyship's affairs, now I may say what I will."

Meanwhile Catherine had written him that she could endure no longer, that she no longer could restrain herself from condign punishment "of those ribald servants that have been left in our house." To which Sarti replied: "For the love of God, for the sake of the honour of the cause and our services, do nothing! Since Your Ladyship has borne so

much, bear it yet a little while!" All would end well. Octavian would be an admirable and obedient son to her, but the evil-minded had so terrified him that he was more dead than alive; his letters were full of tears and anguish. Catherine's innocence would conquer their malignity. A certain Francesco of Parma, once servant to the late Count Girolamo, had "died in want, like a dog." Sarti regretted this, for the "sake of the honour" of Octavian. "Duke Valentino is in the palace, under strong guard." This was in December. In the following January, 1504, the Castellane of Forli announced, to the accompaniment of cannon, that it was his intention to level half the city to the ground, and to offer it to Catherine Sforza. He was supposed to hold the fort for Valentino, but the latter was "detained in the palace" until he gave up the strongholds of his duchy of Romagna to the new Pope. In the College of Cardinals, Ascanio Sforza was in favour of and Raphael Riario averse to her restoration, to which the new Pope seemed favourably inclined.

The Venetian Orator learned, in an interview with Cardinal Riario, that the latter, despite his personal liking for Madonna, could not further her designs, because the Pope intended to keep those States for the Church. And although the Cardinal believed that the Pope would eventually re-invest the Riario with the vicariats of Imola and Forli, he had told the Orator that "neither Pope nor people would consent to the return of Madonna Caterina." The Pope sought the alliance of the Venetians to obtain possession of the forts in which Valentino was said to have hidden his treasure. In conclusion, the Cardinal had confessed that he hoped to be the next pope after this one. Sanuto repeats that the Imolese will not have Madonna back again. On January 11 the Pope received the Imolese envoys, to whom he said: "Since you have no other instructions except to swear obedience to the Church, we will hold the State ourselves." Meanwhile, let them consider if they would prefer to have "a secular Lord as our vicar." His Holiness would favour the Riario "if the whole land were in accord." It was understood that he referred to Giovanni Sassatelli, who had surrendered Imola to Valentino.

The Pope's words led some persons to believe that the Riario might return to Imola, but only through the intervention of Cardinal Riario and without Catherine. "The Pope,[1] in reference to Your Ladyship, said that you had told the said Johanne (Sassatelli) that not you but Cardinal San Giorgio had caused his father to be assassinated. . . . They say of you that in one day you undo the work of fifteen. For the love of God do not thwart the ways of Providence." Catherine's correspondent warns Octavian against going to Rome, should he be summoned. He wished to go to state his grievances, and to complain at being excluded from his State. But if the Pope asked him to sign the renunciation of his rights, how would he defend himself? This state of things could not last for ever, "inasmuch that all our astrologers agree that the Pope cannot outlive the whole of the coming month of October." In which the astrologers were at fault, for Pope Julian II. did not die until February 21, 1513. "The Bentivoglio complain bitterly of Octavian's obstinacy, and wish they had never set eyes on him." And as Catherine would not be withheld from going to Bologna, to keep in touch with Romagnole politics, the trusty Tonelli entreats her not to pass the frontier, but to write him word where to meet her, "and immediately I will conduct Your Ladyship to my house, where my Madonna will make you safe and comfortable . . . and none shall learn of your arrival except those whom you wish to be informed of it."

In February a difference between the Cardinals Riario and Alidosi was arranged by an agreement by which Raphael Riario gave a niece in marriage to Bertrando Alidosi and Imola to Galeazzo, Catherine's third son, on the condition that the Countess would not set foot in that State. The intended wife of the new Lord of Imola was a daughter of Giovanna of Montefeltro, Duchess of Sora. The State would not be given to Octavian "because of his understanding with his mother, for which reason the population would not hear of him." In any case Giovanna of Montefeltro would not give him her daughter "because he was fat beyond measure: his

[1] Doc. 1225.

uncle the cardinal would have him a priest and soon a cardinal."[1]

But on March 24 Tonelli informed Catherine that Octavian was not to have the cardinal's hat after all; that no new cardinals would be elected for the next three years, and that Pope Julian did not care for Galeazzo as a candidate. He had said of Galeazzo that he had "little wool in his petticoat." Poor Octavian had been disparaged by his own friends, who had spread about Rome that "he was thick of blood and brains."[2] "The Duke of Urbino likes him and wonders how he can prefer the Red Hat to the recovery of his States, adding that he was popular at Imola and Forli and a man grown and of some wit. . . . They will have none other lest they fall under the government of priests." But if the Pope will have none of him, of what avail is his popularity? It was rumoured that Catherine was going to Rome. "God send her," cried her partisans. "She would, indeed, teach them reason, and tell the poor people who had been deceived by rogues where to look for justice. Meanwhile Imola was unsettled, and in June there was an armed rising of the populace. None of the Riario had returned, and Octavian declared that he would not give up his States unless they made him a cardinal."

During the fluctuations of this intrigue the Bentivoglio, of whom Catherine had long thought and wrote as her worst enemies, became her devoted friends, and Bologna the head-centre of her partisans. Antenore Giovanetti wrote Catherine, that a certain person had ventured to express to Madonna Ippolita Bentivoglio (a daughter of Carlo Sforza) his hope Catherine would keep away from Bologna, where her presence would be injurious to the prospects of her son Galeazzo. But Ippolita "had so mocked him," saying that if Catherine came to Bologna she would never leave her by day or night, and that her arrival was desired by every member of the House of Bentivoglio, that the misguided man had "remained like a scalded dog, and never again ventured to appear before her." They all sorrowed that her sons were so wanting in

[1] Sanuto, Vol. v. col. 799, and 833. 34. [2] Doc. 1235.

affection for her. . . . The best and most devoted to her was Galeazzo.

Sanuto relates that in December of that year, when Pope Julian conferred knighthood and a gold collar on Giovanni Sassatelli, leader of the Guelph faction, who were for the papal government of Finola, and opposed to the Riario, Octavian, who considered himself Lord of Imola, "went about Rome like a madman" in his despair. The Venetian Orator wrote that he "had become so fearsome that he never went unarmed."

Hatred and distrust of Catherine clashed with the blind faith and love she inspired. "I cannot write you," wrote one of her partisans in July 1504, "so beset am I by a hundred couples of devils, because of the love I bear Your Ladyship." "We are all unhinged as dwellers in a deserted house," wrote Gabriele Piccoli, warrior and poet, from the Fort of Casola Valsenio, "like a vessel at sea, without sail, mast, rudder, or oars. . . . To hearten myself, I have recourse to Your Ladyship with the earnest prayer that you will straighten (our differences), admonish, instruct, counsel and remember us. . . . I do not believe there be a man in the world who loves you with a greater affection than I, wherefore, were I to die a thousand times and be as often resuscitated, so often would I return, my Goddess, to suffer death for your sake." The veteran soldier writes, full of hope, that the troops of the Emperor Maximilian had arrived at Bellinzona, ruined a castle of the Trivulzio, and taken a son of Count Gian-Giacomo prisoner. The Venetians, with their designs on Romagna, were hiring *condottieri*, levying Light Horse, six hundred Foot, etc. . . . . The Count of Caiazzo, and others, had invited Piccoli to join them with several hundred men, but he "would not leave for anything the world (has to offer), and I will die in the faith in which I have lived. You are more adored than ever; every one hopes in Your Ladyship . . . . and I for one will prove to you that I am not so worn out as to be incapable of more than you expect; for if I was anxious to serve you, now it has become a necessity to me. Your Ladyship criticizes the ruggedness of my speech in terms

so suave, gentle, cordial and delightful that they move me to tears. I hold my ruggedness in affection in that it has brought me such a letter from Your Ladyship. Nicolò dal Sale longs for your coming; he adores you, and so do many others whom, in time, I will make known to you—this is not the season. I have some sonnets and other material; these also I hope to show you. The courier wants to start. *Bene et feliciter valeat semper Dominatio Vestra, o Divinitas et spes mea. Ex Faventia X. Julii*, 1507. *Servolus Gabriel Piccolus.*"

Catherine, on leaving Florence, retired to Castello, a possession of her late husband's; but even there it was not given to her to devote herself peacefully, either to the education of Giannino or the rustic and domestic avocations that she loved. For in the rest of this woman of action inactivity had no part; her housekeeping included the minutest details of supervision; she was a breeder and lover of animals; her book of *Experiments* (edited from her own handwriting by Count Lucantonio Cuppano) and her letters prove that the health and well-being of her dependents interested her no less than the hygiene of a plague-stricken city. Her correspondence ranged from high politics to exchanges with the Marquis of Mantua of a recipe for making nineteen-carat gold for a cosmetic; from letters to holy men (in 1497 Savonarola had been among their number) to the discussion of Spanish genets; from sporting dogs with the Duchess of Ferrara to the loan of that princess's tailor; from complaints to the Duke her husband of the nefarious designs of the Pope, to thanks for the gift of salted eels (which, despite their political differences, she will "eat for love of him"); from discussion of the growth and distribution of grain with her factor to a letter, written within a few months of her death, to "Anna a Hebrew," on the subject of tonics for the skin. With all this, Catherine found time to be a notable needlewoman. Battista Riario writes in 1502, from Blois, to acknowledge her kindness in having made him seven shirts *à la Française:* "The Lord Octavian writes me that Your Ladyship has made me seven beautiful shirts, of which I stand much in need.

The Lord Octavian writes that he will give them to me with his own hand, but I pray you to be pleased to send them to Madonna Caterina at Pavia, who hath many an opportunity of sending them to me, for I doubt whether we meet within six months. . . ." And, above all, there was Giannino to make a man of.

Pier Francesco de' Medici and Lorenzo, her brother-in-law, disputed her possession of the Villa Castello, whence Catherine, as if it had been another Forli, declared that "they should only get her in pieces;" but soon after, exasperated by disputes with her sons on money matters, she fled from it "for a quiet place." "I send Your Lordship Maria, Giovanni, Benedetto Battista, and Palarino with my cattle. . . . Keep them yourselves with the cattle, and send the slave Maria to the service of my mother in Milan, and have no care for me, for the Lord is with me, and you know that He will not abandon me. Have a care for your health, and say the same to the Archbishop (Cæsar), but take special care of yourself, for you need it. Be not anxious for me, for things will soon be settled and in the right way. *Castello, die* 21 *Junii*, 1502. *Caterina Sf. Manu pp. a.*"



CASTELLO: A VILLA OF THE MEDICI NEAR FLORENCE.

This letter to Octavian was followed by one from Fortunati. "The sincerity with which I serve you," wrote the worthy canon, "constrains me to impress on Your Lordships that Madonna your mother has decided on leaving you because of the bad conduct of Alberto, who has been acting on your behalf. . . . The pain you have caused her is scarcely credible, and it inspires every one with the greatest compassion for her. . . . I can do nothing, for the offence is so public that it can neither be endured nor repaired, and I am sure that it will have disastrous result unless Your Lordships do provide against it, which you could do well personally or through the Cardinal (Riario): otherwise I pray Your Lordships to believe that this will be a greater loss and injury to you than the loss of your dominions . . . . I have instructed Franceschino Merenda to ask Madonna Bianca[1] to send table linen and sheets, and the six forks and spoons and other necessaries, so that the displeasure (of the Countess) may be in part assuaged. But she has not stirred, so that I cannot think he gave her my message: for Madonna Bianca is not one to neglect so important a matter. When Scipio arrived I sent Franceschino to ask Madonna Bianca to provide for his sleeping accommodation, which was immediately done. This has increased Her Excellency's anger: not that he should have been well treated, but that she should be the only person to be excluded from all sort of comfort and well-being. Now I have no more to say, except to appeal to the wisdom of Your Lordships to put an end to this state of things in the manner which seems to you best, and may God grant you take it sanely and in good part. . . . *22nd July*, 1501."

On the same day Catherine wrote to her sons as follows:—

"*Illustris D. et filii benedicte*,

"The Piovano's letter will have informed you of my needs. First of all I wish Maria to be sent for and conducted to my mother . . . and if you return here bring my

[1] Catherine's daughter, afterwards Countess of San Secondo, then living in temporary retirement in a convent, "in much comfort and ease," wrote a certain Alberto, probably her brother's agent.

mule and my other animals that are in the stables of Messer Giovanni da Casale, and ask Melozzo for an account of what he has spent in their maintenance, with that of my people; for I will requite him to the utmost. Bring with you the groom and stableman. I will not have Benedetto here again; if you have any use for him, take him and tell him that this is my will. If, on the other hand, you are not returning immediately, send my mule and the other beasts by Melozzo with the groom and the stableman. Nicolò can come for Maria, take her to my mother, and then return to you. Your Lordships will be so good as to attend promptly to these matters, without reproach to me if the cattle have been sent to Messer Giovanni, to whom I did not send them. I sent them to Your Lordships. You know (best) who has been the cause of this, but since I have not suffered dishonour except in my own family and to my (personal) humiliation, I am well pleased, for they (the cattle and their attendants) have been maintained hitherto. But the shame, My Lords, is that which is of your own making and (which you) have permitted others to do to me. Let it rest with God, and even for this I have found a remedy. I find myself with twenty-three mouths to feed: five horses and three mules, all of which I have to maintain without a *soldo* to do it on. No one has given me so much as a glass of water, and what is worse, neither a table-cloth, napkin nor pair of sheets wherewith to provide for the following of Messer Scipio. I will bear this until I have your answer, and then I shall know what to do. Since I was born I have ne'er been so hurt nor so uncomfortable . . . God help me . . . God forgive you . . ."

There is another letter from her hiding-place, in which Catherine tells her son Cæsar that "between this and Castello I have to provide for twenty-nine mouths, five saddle-horses and three mules, for which I have no money, neither do you send me any. . . . I will put all my affairs in order, but you, as good sons, should have told me yourselves, in good time, that you wished to free yourselves of me instead of giving me this information through Alberto and in such a manner. . . ."

Well might Guasconi write Octavian: "You have but two

friends, your mother and the Piovano, and be assured that had not your mother in person cried 'Help! help!' to the Gonfaloniere, absolutely Your Lordship would never have had a copper. You treat Her Ladyship execrably . . . you never write a word to her, and I fear that God will punish you, and that she, in her despair, will let everything go to ruin. Should Her Ladyship lose patience, as I fear she must, it is plain that you will be a ruined man."

While these humiliating discussions were pending, legal questions arose as to her right to the guardianship of Giannino de' Medici, which were no sooner settled than Octavian wrote asking her to refund moneys due to him. Her third son, Galeazzo, never swerved in duty nor affection to her: "Any little word of Your Excellency," he wrote, "would send me from Rome to Jerusalem." A letter from the Piovano Fortunati indicates a better state of things in September 1503, but in the following year Catherine was again in urgent need of money. Giovanetti advised her not to try to sell her jewels in Milan, Genoa, Paris, nor Lyons. In Milan there was no market, at Genoa there was the plague, and in Paris and Lyons marriages were not solemnized in the prevailing heat.[1] Yet she was obliged to sell, because her sons, she averred, had stripped her of everything. In a letter to an unknown person, she wishes the Emperor to be informed that peace is denied to her, even after she has lost her States. "If," she adds, "our States should unfortunately pass into my sons' hands by other than my means, in truth they would have no more respect for me than for a servant." For this reason she strives to regain the States herself for Octavian. Meanwhile, failing to sell her jewels, she pledged them to Pagolantonio Soderini for 2464 ducats.

On August 12, 1507, Octavian prays her to send him fifty ducats, or at least a piece of crimson *camelot* for a vestment to wear on the occasion of the Pope's arrival, to send him the *corniola* (the seal) and his song-book, but, above all, to procure for him the much-coveted Red Hat. He also begs her to give him frequent news of Germany, "because our Most

[1] Doc. 1263.

Reverend Monsignor often asks me: *Bene domine Episcope, Madonna ve scrive niente de le cose de li Todeschi?*[1] and I know not what to say and stand there like a fool." In March 1508, he had "a bestial creditor, who made of no yes, and of yes no . . . and he prayed Madonna, his beloved mother, to ease his shoulders of this burden," also to find him "a trustworthy Vicar" (naming his conditions), and to send him the great song-book in which are written all the things of the Holy Week, that he may learn them in time. Above all, he entreats her to remember him when the friend (the Emperor) shall arrive in Italy . . . to get for him (Octavian) if possible "that Red Thing, which will be, whether you will or no, more yours than mine: for if you will have none of me, I have need of you, and will never fail in the duties of a good son to you." He concludes by recommending to her his natural daughter, Cornelia.

The lawsuit with the House of Medici ended in favour of Catherine, with an "eulogy" pronounced by Girolamo da Pagolo Bencivieni on the dissensions and respective rights of Pierfrancesco di Lorenzo de' Medici, Madonna Caterina Sforza and Giovanni di Giovanni de' Medici her son. Lorenzo had, for reasons of his own, withheld from Catherine large sums of money due to her as guardian of Giannino, and disputed her right to this guardianship. The legal question which arose was: Did Catherine forfeit her civil rights on becoming a prisoner of the Pope? The reply was: No because her imprisonment was illegal.

Catherine wrote to the Marquis of Mantua, asking for his protection and that of Giovanni Gonzaga, his brother, who was then in Germany, whom she prayed to "lay her affairs before His Imperial Majesty and the Most Christian Queen." A little later Luigi Ciocha, a partisan of Catherine's, wrote to the Marquis of Mantua, praying him to "favour her in her struggle with Lorenzino de' Medici, who withheld from her many thousand ducats and the guardianship of her infant son, son to the Magnifico Giovanni, so that Lorenzino may

[1] "Well, my Lord Bishop, does Madonna write you naught of the affairs of Germany?"

not keep from her that which is hers, and may cease to do injury to her, as heretofore." These letters date from the year 1503, one of Catherine's most unhappy years.

"Fear not but that God will help you," wrote the worthy Fortunati, "and leave all to me, for this child moves me to do more than I could have imagined, if only for the love of the blessed dead, who loved you so well. And believe that I am unconscious of any slight, either on Your Excellency's part or on that of others . . . and that I am your devoted servant." Meanwhile Lorenzo, either by force or treachery, succeeded in taking the child from Catherine and so getting him into his own hands. Catherine had again recourse to law, whence it resulted that an uncle could not be at the same time heir and guardian of his nephew, and the child was restored to his mother.

But Catherine realized that even in her arms her child was not safe from the nefarious designs of Lorenzo, who had spent a great part of his brother's heritage, a breach of trust which could not fail to be discovered if the boy were permitted to come to full age. To avoid public scandal and the reprisals of his nephew, Lorenzo would not hesitate to again steal him from his mother, and Catherine, who knew that his life was in danger, speedily conveyed him, with some female attendants, to the educational convent of Annalena. For eight months the great captain of the sixteenth century, like another Achilles in Scyros, wore girl's clothes and remained in the care of these nuns, to whom when he came to man's estate he substantially proved his gratitude. This is the origin of the many favours granted to the nuns of Annalena by future Grand-Dukes and Duchesses of Tuscany.

From the day in which Lorenzo had lost his case and been obliged to restore Giannino to his mother, he not only lost the hope of enriching himself at the child's expense, but the consideration of his fellow-citizens, to whom his nefarious designs had become known. So great was his despair at the loss of his fair fame that he fell ill of it and died. The death of Lorenzo is the last dramatic incident in the life of Catherine, who returned to Castello with Giannino and there

devoted the peaceful close of her life "to training him (Giannino, the future Giovanni dalle Bande Nere) in every virtue and surrounding him with masters who could accustom him to all those exercises suitable to his rank."[1] In which love's labour was partly lost; "for the sturdy boy cared little for letters, but from his childhood upwards only for riding, swimming and those exercises that best become a man of war. . . ." The boy was indocile and passionate, but of an affectionate and generous nature, and Catherine exulted in him. Heaven had listened to her prayer: a new Sforza had sprung from her womb. Catherine wrote to a former officer of hers, a certain Baccino da Cremona, that at last her child had been given back to her whole and hearty; would he (Baccino) "find a small and beautiful saddlehorse (pony) for him who was all fire, arms and horses?" Baccino replied: "So you have recovered your child! I could not be happier if my father were resuscitated, and it is the same with all the *condottieri* who are in camp. The day that your letter arrived the Commissioner did not eat for joy. . . . We will look for the horse among the *condottieri*, and whoever has (what we want) will be pleased to place it at our service."[2]

Catherine, who was determined that her son should be a typical prince of the Renascence, knew that strength and valour alone would not suffice to endow him, and from 1505 sought learned tutors for him, far and wide. Among many letters on this subject there is a curious one from a butcher, Maestro Vincenzo da Sassuolo, once in Catherine's service, recommending her "a gentleman to instruct her little child . . . a man of about thirty-five, of a fine presence and very well apparelled, so that on only looking on him it is easy to divine that he comes of gentle blood and is more accustomed to having dependants of his own than being dependent himself."[3]

This gentleman who for "certain misfortunes of his own" sought a home far from his birthplace, "where the air did not

[1] *Vita de Giovanni Medici*, by Gian Girolamo Rossi, Bishop of Pavia and son of Catherine's daughter Bianca, Countess of San Secondo.

[2] Doc. 1312. [3] Doc. 1314.

agree with him," so highly recommended in September, either did not go to Castello or stayed there but a short time; for on the 4th of the following December a certain Ser Bartolomeo Massaconi wrote to the Piovano Fortunati, that he was ready to go there but that he would not bind himself to always live under the roof of the Countess. He would stay there when it suited him, and therefore would have a room set aside for his use. He promises to ride with the boy and in every way adequately perform the duties of a tutor to him. But if he is to be treated like his predecessors, "we will let the matter drop, for I am accustomed to be treated like a pet sparrow, and to suffer little inconvenience except what I bring upon myself."[1] Ser Bartolomeo had heard that former tutors had eaten with the servants and endured much discomfort, even to sleeping on mattresses and with the dependents of the villa. Ser Bartolomeo cannot have stayed there long, because on December 30, 1507, Serristori wrote Fortunati[2] from Rome that he was looking for a tutor for Giannino, then in his tenth year, but that it was difficult to find one worthy of the trust. "You know," he wrote, "how plentiful are rogues, and if this preceptor be not good beyond the average and in every sense of the word, he cannot possibly be a member of Madonna's household." In this Serristori differs from Ser Bartolomeo. The hard necessity of war and politics had brought Catherine in contact with men of diverse calibre, she had met with cowards and traitors (such as Achilles Tiberti); but all those who enjoyed her personal confidence were (like the Piovano Fortunati) good and honourable men. Catherine, mindful of her past sovereignty, determined to make of her son a man capable of ruling States and leading armies. During his childhood, the future Captain of the Black Bands had never feared nor obeyed any one but her, "so that when Catherine, his mother, was dead, there was no one who could correct nor admonish him."[3]

[1] Doc. 1312.

[2] Serristori adds that on the day he wrote the cannons of St. Angelo were being fired in honour of a Portuguese victory in the island of Ceylon.

[3] Gian Girolamo Rossi. *Vita di Giovanni Medici.*

That time was fast approaching, for Catherine's days were numbered. In June 1508 her foot caused her suffering and her robust constitution showed signs of beginning to give way. In April 1509 she was very ill, and reported to be dying, but recovered and believed herself to be cured.

Octavian Riario wrote from Viterbo to Fortunati complaining that he had not been written to "when Madonna my mother was at the point of death." Ludovico Albertini, a chemist of Forli, wrote affectionately to the Countess, asking her for news of her health. Bishop Sebastiano of Galeata wrote to Fortunati that having heard that both he and the Countess were dead, he had vowed to make a pilgrimage to the Madonna of Loreto if the report were to prove unfounded. He not only heard that Catherine was alive and well but that she contemplated a pilgrimage to that shrine, in which he offered to accompany her.[1]

But in May, to the dismay of her dependents, she was again ill. Prayers were offered in the Church of Trebbio, and Ludovico Vaini, her factor at Trebbio, wrote anxiously to Fortunati for news of Madonna, for whose recovery he would have masses said. Meanwhile the illness made rapid strides until, ten days later, Catherine lay on her death-bed in her house in Florence. The two physicians who attended her had tortured her up to then by applications of boiling plasters, according to the custom of their day. But Catherine could not endure more pain, and feeling that although her mind was perfectly clear she was losing strength, she expressed a wish to make her will. Ser Pietro del Serra, notary, was brought to her bedside, and to him, in the presence of three citizens, she dictated her last wishes.

Catherine Sforza recommended her soul to Almighty God, to the Virgin and the Saints of Paradise, and her body to the Convent of Santa Maria delle Murate. Her funeral was to be devoid of pomp and its expenses limited to mere necessaries.

As a citizen of Florence she set aside a legacy towards the building of Santa Maria del Fiore and the reconstruction of

[1] Doc. 1349.

the walls. She charged Fortunati to have 1000 masses said for the repose of her soul, in Florence, within two months of her death, and founded a yearly and perpetual service of thirty masses to be celebrated in the oratory of the Murate, with alms for the nuns. She requested Giovanni de' Medici, her son, to pay 2000 gold florins to her grandchild Cornelia, natural daughter of Octavian, Bishop of Viterbo, on her marriage, and meanwhile to maintain her at the Convent delle Murate. Should she become a nun her dower would only be of three hundred florins. To pay 1000 gold florins to her grand-

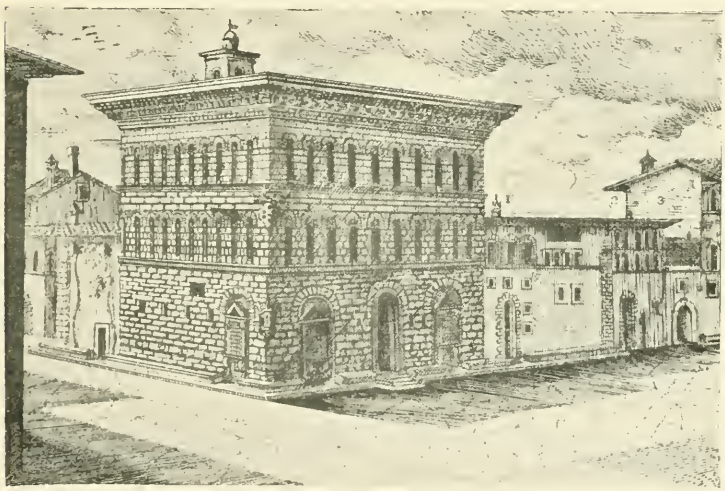


MARIA SALVIATI DE' MEDICI.

child Julia, legitimate daughter of her son Galeazzo, to maintain her till her marriage at the Murate, and in the event of her taking the veil to give her only three hundred florins. To Cornelia and Julia were bequeathed the chests of linen deposited for safe custody with the Sisters of the Murate, both the chests and their contents to be handed over to their future husbands. Fortunati and Giacomo Salviati were appointed the executors of this legacy. A dower was set aside for her maid Giovanna, "daughter to the Signora Cecilia," and for another surnamed the Moretta, the sum to be deposited in the *Monte di Pietà* of Florence. At this point, almost with her last breath, the Countess signed to

Giacomo Salviati to come nearer, and implored him to send the girls to their homes and keep them there till the day of their marriage. She also charged Salviati to give a remembrance of her to her trusty servant Baccino and to settle all Fortunati's accounts, leaving to the latter her books, letters, public and private documents, with power to do with them as he thought best, "even to tearing them to bits." To Carlo (Bernardino) her son by her second husband, now in his twenty-first year, she left 2000 gold florins.

To Giovanni, son of Giovanni de' Medici, her third husband,



MEDICI CASTLE, FLORENCE.
2. House of Giovanni da Lutiano.
3. Ancient House of the Medici, where Catherine Sforza died.

she bequeathed all her real and landed estate, "and because the testatrix earnestly desires her beloved son to grow in modesty and gentleness, according to the manner of his country," she confided him to Fortunati and Salviati and willed that they watch over his education until he should have attained his eighteenth year. She desired that he might marry as early as possible.[1] If, despite the counsel of Fortunati and Salviati, Giovanni should not fulfil his mother's

[1] He married Maria, daughter of Giacomo Salviati, whose son was the first Grand Duke of Tuscany; see portrait, p. 35, Vol. ii.

wishes, or should die without offspring, the property left to him would be vested in the Guild of Exchange and a convent founded and endowed with the income of this property and dowers provided therefrom for poor maidens. To Giovanni Catherine also left her slave Mora Bona.

To Galeazzo Riario she bequeathed the Castle of Bosco, given to her father, Duke Galeazzo, as part of her marriage-portion. Should Galeazzo die without leaving an heir his brother Sforza would inherit from him; failing an heir to Sforza, Castel del Bosco would go to his half-brother Giovanni.

To Octavian, Bishop of Viterbo, Cæsar, Archbishop of Pisa, Galeazzo Sforza Riario, Catherine bequeathed all other property of which she died possessed outside the dominion of Florence.

When this testament had been read to her and she had declared it to be "in truth her last will and testament," the tolling of the bell of San Lorenzo announced to the Florentines that the agony of Madonna d'Imola had begun, and many citizens, according to the pious custom of their day, assembled their families within their houses, or in the various churches, to pray that in that dark hour God would stand by her who "had ever placed the poor by the side of the rich." [1]

[1] Bernardi, who, in describing the autopsy, indicates that the cause of death was pleurisy complicated by peritonitis. "Her Excellency gave up her spirit to God on May 28 (1509), being about forty-two years of age (she was forty-six), tall of stature and very well proportioned, with a fair and fine complexion, great eyes and white hair."

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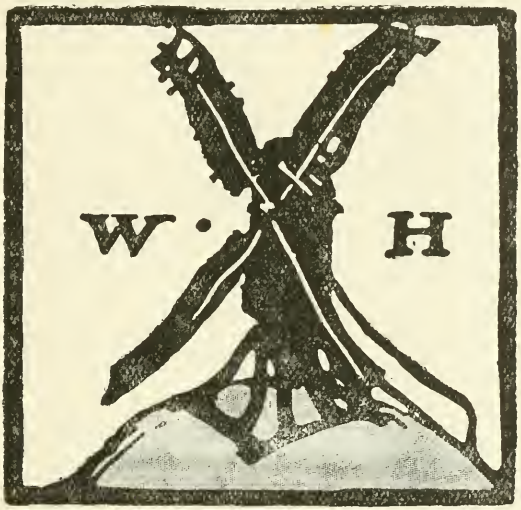
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